

FIFTEEN

SEPT.



WESTERN

15
STORIES

TALES

25
CENTS

A STORY OF
BULLET
RECKONING

THE MAN THAT HELL FORGOT

by **GEORGE
MICHENER**

T. C. McCLARY

**LEWIS B.
PATTEN**
MANY
OTHERS

A GRAVE AT GUNRISE

by **GEORGE
C. APPELL**

• **UNEXCELLED VARIETY—INCREASED WORDAGE** •

YOU CAN'T LOSE!

HAVE A PROFIT MAKING BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN

NATIONALLY
ADVERTISED
PRODUCTS

NO
EXPERIENCE
NECESSARY

NO
MONEY
TO
INVEST

FREE
SAMPLE
OUTFITS

FULL
OR
PART TIME

A LIFETIME FUTURE

Man or woman—young or old, YOU can earn a steady income in full or spare time as an independent Kendex dealer. Amazing and almost "impossible" earnings can become a reality for you. Herbert Armstrong of Tenn. earned \$202 in 9 days. C. O. Watkins of Oregon sent 92 orders in one day. You have the same opportunity to duplicate these exceptional earnings. Over one million dollars will be earned in 1950 by Kendex dealers—why not let us establish you in your own business and get a share of these wonderful earnings?

KENDEX NYLONS REPLACED FREE . . .

if they run or snag within guarantee period up to three months! Impossible? It's true! No matter what the cause—hard use or deliberate abuse—whether it is fault of the hose or the wearer—Kendex nylons are replaced FREE if they run, snag or become unfit for wear within the guarantee period. How could any woman resist a positive guarantee of satisfaction when she can obtain it without paying any more than other standard advertised brands? Kendex nylons are NOT sold in stores, so you have no competition. Complete line includes everything from heavy 70 denier service weight to possumer luxurious ultra sheer 15 denier 60 gauge. Proportioned sizes and lengths. Latest colors plus white.

LINGERIE - ROBES - HOUSECOATS - MEN'S HOSE

In addition to the sensational Kendex nylons, you will have a complete line of glamorous lingerie, beautiful robes and housecoats plus a complete line of Kentcraft men's hosiery guaranteed for one full year. Any pair or pairs of men's hose that does not give satisfactory wear within one year of purchase will be replaced FREE!

NATIONALLY ADVERTISED

Kendex will spend over \$350,000.00 in 1950 to tell millions of readers of the advantages in buying from you. Almost every issue of Good Housekeeping, Saturday Evening Post, McCall's, Women's Home Companion and Ladies' Home Journal carry our advertising in addition to many others. Kendex has advertised in Life, Look, Collier's, etc. Awarded Good Housekeeping Seal. Thousands of orders are shipped daily from coast to coast.

**FREE
NYLON
STOCKING**

EVERYTHING GIVEN FREE

Risk nothing! Mail coupon and we will send you, free and prepaid, complete money-making outfits including sample nylon stocking, samples of lingerie, robes, housecoats and men's hose fabrics and everything you need to immediately start making money. Complete outfits become your property even if you don't send any business. Simply write orders, we deliver and collect. Advance cash plus huge bonus. No money or experience needed. Mailing the coupon is all you need to start on the road to a 52-weeks-of-the-year high paying business of your own. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

KENDEX CORP., BABYLON 59, N. Y.



FOUR MONEY-MAKING LINES

- WOMEN'S NYLON HOSIERY
- GLAMOROUS LINGERIE
- HOUSECOATS—ROBES
- MEN'S HOSIERY

NOTHING
TO
PAY

MAIL
TODAY

NO
OBLIGATION

**KENDEX CORP.
BABYLON 59, N. Y.**

Date _____ 1950

Send me, free and prepaid, everything I need to make money as a Kendex dealer, including sample stocking etc. There is nothing for me to pay now or later and I am under no obligation in accepting your money-making outfits.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____

THE TRAIL LED TO BEDROOM "B"

THEY FELL FOR IT! NOW WE'LL HAVE
THE "TOP SECRET" ENVELOPE IS GONE A DECOY TO LEAD US
TO THEIR HIDEOUT!



AS THE "CAPITOL COMET" STREAKS
THROUGH THE NIGHT, TWO GOVERNMENT
AGENTS SEEM PLEASED TO FIND THEIR
BRIEF CASE HAS BEEN LOOTED...

LATE THAT NIGHT

HERE'S OUR MAN!
WHAT SPACE,
GEORGE?

THAT PAIR'S FROM
BEDROOM "B", SIR.
BLOND GENTLEMAN



USING A GEIGER COUNTER, OUR AGENTS
PICK UP TRACES OF A MILDLY RADIO-
ACTIVE DUST THEY HAD SPRINKLED
ON THEIR BEDROOM FLOOR

I'LL TRAIL HIM, JOE.
YOU WAIT AT THE
BUREAU FOR MY
CALL

RIGHT. THIS
LOOKS LIKE
THE PAY-OFF



THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

WHO ARE
YOU?

WE'RE GOVERNMENT
AGENTS. YOU'RE
UNDER ARREST!



THE CHIEF WANTS
YOU THERE WHEN HE
GIVES THE STORY TO
THE PAPERS, CHES

THEN I'D BETTER
SHAVE RIGHT NOW.
I DIDN'T HAVE TIME
THIS MORNING



THIN
GILLETTES.
EH? THANKS



WHAT A SWEET,
SLICK SHAVE! NO
WONDER I'VE BEEN
HEARING ABOUT
THESE BLADES

THIN
GILLETTES
ARE PLENTY
KEEN



BUT HOW DID YOU
KNOW JUST WHO
TOOK THE
"ENVELOPE"?

THAT'S AN
OFFICIAL
SECRET

A FINE-
LOOKING
LAD, JUST THE
TYPE FOR THAT
NEW YORK
VACANCY



FOR SHAVES THAT ARE EASY, GOOD-LOOKING
AND MIGHTY ECONOMICAL, USE **THIN
GILLETTES**, THE FASTEST-SELLING BLADES
IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. THIN GILLETTES
ARE PRECISION MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE
RAZOR EXACTLY AND PROTECT YOU FROM
NICKS AND RAZOR BURN. ASK FOR THEM
IN THE CONVENIENT, NEW 10-BLADE
PACKAGE WITH USED-BLADE
COMPARTMENT



NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

ON THE JOB OR FOR YOUR FAVORITE HOBBIES

Lee Work Clothes
Wear Longer-Look Better!



Lee Industrial Uniforms



Lee Union-Alls



YOU CAN BUY LEE WORK CLOTHES IN MORE RETAIL STORES
 COAST-TO-COAST THAN ANY OTHER BRAND.



Lee Matched Shirts and Pants



Lee Dungarees



Lee Riders for Men and Boys



Ladies' Lee Riders

THE H. D. LEE COMPANY, INC.

Kansas City, Mo. San Francisco, Calif.
 Minneapolis, Minn.
 Trenton, N. J. South Bend, Ind.



COPYRIGHT 1939
 THE H. D. LEE CO., INC.

WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURERS OF UNION-MADE WORK CLOTHES

NEXT ISSUE OUT SEPTEMBER 8th!

FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES

15 STORIES 25 CENTS

VOLUME 22, No. 4



SEPTEMBER, 1950

Two Big Novels

1. **DEATH CROWDS MY SIXES**.....*Steve Frazee* 10
Bowen traded his life for the life of the man he had ridden from the grave to kill!
2. **THE MARK OF THE MONTEREY KID**.....*John K. Butler* 82
"When you send the Monterey Kid to hell, just give him a couple of guns . . . and a man's chance to fight his way out!"

Copyright 1941 by Fictioneers Inc., a subsidiary of Popular Publications Inc.

Smashing Western Fiction

3. **A GRAVE AT GUNRISE**.....*George C. Appell* 32
"Live by a gun—or die by a rope—" was the desperate choice the law gave him!
4. **KILL-PROUD**.....*Thomas Thompson* 42
Jim Colliver knew he'd been born to hang—but not till he'd ridden to the end of his rope did his thundering guns say why!
5. **GRAVE SUDDEN**.....*Lewis B. Patten* 52
"A fight that's worth winning, mister—is worth losing. Go for your gun—and die!"
6. **THE MAN THAT HELL FORGOT**.....*George Michener* 62
All his life Old John had listened for the siren-call of wild trails—and then he heard their bullet whisper!
7. **BULLET IN WAITING**.....*Clark Gray* 74
"You can buy land for money, mister—but the price of a man is lead!"
8. **SHOOT—OR SHOW YELLOW!**.....*T. C. McClary* 110
A fast iron may change a man's brand—but only blood will wash out a yellow streak!
9. **DEAD WRONG**.....*Wallace Umphrey* 122
"We've missed you, Kid," his home town told him, "but come back a-shootin'—an' our bullets won't!"

Departments and Features

10. **ON THE TRAIL**..... Death rides overland*The Editors* 6
11. **CATTLE COUNTRY QUIZ**... Snake water ... *Hallack McCord* 51
12. **HIGH IRON JOHN**..... The gallows road.....*M. Kane* 57
13. **TALES OF THE OLD WEST**..... Medals for all.....*Lee* 72
14. **RECORD RODEO**..... The music of the West.....*Joey Sasso* 108
15. **SUDDEN DEATH STREET**.. Six-gun celebration ..*Ray P. Shotwell* 121

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES is published monthly by Fictioneers, Inc., a subsidiary of Popular Publications, Inc., at 123 19th Street, New Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Henry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice-President and Treasurer. Authorized by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada as second-class matter. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Annual subscription \$2.00. When submitting manuscripts enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Printed in Canada.

4 Keys to SUCCESS IN AVIATION

Through Embry Riddle Training



AIRCRAFT & ENGINE MECHANICS

An urgent need exists for properly trained A & E Mechanics throughout commercial aviation. Our C.A.A. approved school with a quarter-century of experience assures your quickest advancement. Embry-Riddle students learn fast with modern equipment . . . working on live aircraft in airline-size hangars.



AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING

Embry-Riddle's 2-yr. Aeronautical Engineering Course provides training at the technical institute level. Engineers with management responsibility enjoy highest salaries!



A.&E. COMBINED WITH COMMERCIAL

Airmen with dual pilot-engineering ability are needed by aviation companies and operators. Embry-Riddle combination training offers you the most in your aviation career.



COMMERCIAL PILOTS

Flying holds a real future for Embry-Riddle trained pilots. A quarter-century of experience with 30,000 students . . . the best instructors, up-to-date aircraft, superb year-round flying weather . . . qualifications unexcelled anywhere. Instrument and instructor's ratings are also available.



Aviation needs you now! Never has there been such opportunity for you in aviation. Start your career now at Embry-Riddle — living facilities directly on the Airport. Write today for full information and great job opportunities.

Dean of Enrollments - Dept. A.
Embry-Riddle School of Aviation
Miami 30, Florida

Please Print

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

City _____

State _____ Age _____

I am interested in . . .

☐ A.&E. Mechanic

☐ Commercial Pilot

☐ Aeronautical

Engineering

☐ A.&E. Combined

with Commercial

Pilot

☐ Flying Mechanic

☐ Drafting & Design

Check ☐ Veteran

One ☐ Non-Veteran

TRAIN IN MIAMI—AIR CAPITAL OF THE WORLD



On The Trail

WE'RE MIGHTY glad to be with you at trailside again, amigos, for our regular session on Western business. And we're happy to bring our September drive to the railheads, with Steve Frazee's story of the vengeance trail, *Death Crowds My Sixes*, riding point for us. We think the Frazee yarn is one of the best we've had in a while, and we're waiting to hear from you on it.

Here's a Western first. The story of the first two women to make the emigration on the overland trail:

Dear Editor:

The first women to reach California by the Overland Trail were the daughters of George Yount, a Napa Valley rancher. They arrived in 1844, one of them a pretty youngster of sixteen, the other a bride of twenty, accompanied by her husband. For the record, they were early. But to the girls and their father, they were late arrivals indeed. A dozen years late . . . and behind them was the third woman, the latest of all, who was never going to come.

Yount had first turned westward from Missouri when the girls were little children.

(Continued on page 8)

YOU UNIVERSITY TRAINING

KEY TO SUCCESS IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses

Air Conditioning
Heating Plumbing
Refrigeration
Steam Fitting

Chemical Courses

Chemical Engineering
Chemistry, Analytical
Chemistry, Industrial
Chemistry, Mfg. Iron and Steel
Petroleum Refining
Plastics
Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses

Architectural Drafting
Architecture
Building Estimating
Civil Engineering
Coal Mining
Contracting and Building
Highway Engineering
Lumber Dealer
Reading Structural Blueprints
Sanitary Engineering
Structural Drafting
Structural Engineering
Surveying and Mapping

Communications Courses

Electronics Television
Practical Telephony
Radio, General
Radio Operating
Radio Servicing
Telegraph Engineering

Electrical Courses

Electrical Drafting
Electrical Engineering
Electric Light and Power
Lighting Technician
Power House Electric
Practical Electrician
Ship Electrician

Internal Combustion Engines Courses

Auto Technician
Aviation
Diesel-Electric
Diesel Engines
Gas Engines

Mechanical Courses

Aeronautical Eng'rs, Jr.
Aircraft Drafting
Flight Engineer
Forging Foundry Work
Heat Treatment of Metals
Industrial Engineering
Industrial Instrumentation

Industrial Metallurgy

Machine Shop
Machine Shop Insp.
Mechanical Engineering
Mold-Loft Work
Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
Reading Shop Blueprints
Sheet-Metal Drafting
Sheet-Metal Worker
Ship Drafting
Ship Fitting
Tool Designing
Toolmaking
Welding Engineering
Welding—Gas and Elec.

Railroad Courses

Air Brake
Car Inspector
Diesel Locomotive
Locomotive Engineer
Locomotive Fireman
Locomotive Machinist
Railroad Section Foreman
Steam-Diesel Loco. Eng.

Stationary Engineering Courses

Boilermaking
Combustion Engineering
Engine Running
Marine Engineering
Power Plant Engr.
Steam Engineering

Textile Courses

Cotton Manufacturing
Loom Fixing
Rayon Weaving
Textile Designing
Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Courses

Accounting Advertis'
App. Psychology
Bookkeeping
Business Administration
Business Correspondence
Business Law
Cert. Pub. Accounting
Commercial
Commercial Art
Cost Accounting
Federal Tax
First Year College
Foremanship French
Good English
High School
Higher Mathematics
Illustration
Industrial Supervision
Motor Traffic
Postal Civil Service
Retailing
Retail Bus. Mgmt.
Salesmanship
Secretarial
Sign Lettering
Spanish Stenography
Traffic Management

APPROVED UNDER THE G.I. BILL

IF YOU ARE AMBITIOUS AND
WILLING TO STUDY . . .

I. C. S. CAN TEACH YOU!

• Special service and attention are
always given to the student who may
need extra help in order to understand.

Coupon Brings Full Information

**The successful man DOES today what the failure
INTENDS to do tomorrow. Mail this coupon NOW!**

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 3278-D, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Please send complete information on the following subject:

(Write above Technical, Business or Academic Subject in which you are interested.)

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Present Position _____ Working _____ Hours _____ A.M. _____ P.M.

Employed by _____

Length of Service in World War II _____

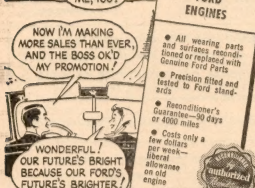
Enrollment under G.I. Bill approved for World War II Veterans.
Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces.

"Our Future's Brighter"

says Curt Davis,
"SINCE I GAVE OUR
FAITHFUL FORD
A NEW FUTURE"



"SO I FIXED UP MY FORD TO
STEP UP MY SALES"



Wherever you buy reconditioned Ford Engines or Engine Accessories, be sure to look for this Authorized Reconditioner's emblem

**AUTHORIZED
RECONDITIONED
FORD
ENGINES**

- All wearing parts and surfaces reconditioned or replaced with Genuine Ford Parts
- Precision fitted and tested to Ford standards
- Reconditioner's Guarantee—90 days or 4000 miles
- Costs only a few dollars per week—liberal allowance on old engine



FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES

(Continued from page 6)

A sudden financial reversal had left him badly in debt. Rather than face the long uphill years of saving and scrimping that would have been his lot as a farmer, he decided to head for the Santa Fe Trail, where he hoped to recoup in short order, by trade or whatever other means might be offered.

Yount had an exciting time, for a tenderfoot. The years passed more rapidly than he realized, as he learned skills foreign to Missouri, and became one of the more noted of the mountain men. As a trapper, however, he found himself still far from amassing the sum he needed to clear his debts back east.

The days of the fur trade threatened to fade—and besides, Yount found himself yearning for a roof over his head on chilly mornings. He drifted into California, and built in the Napa Valley. At last he had a home as comfortable as the one he had left behind him, and so he asked Joseph Chiles, the pioneer scout, to bring Mrs. Yount and the little ones over the trail in the next emigration and it was Chiles who brought them out.

Not till the arrival of the young ladies from Missouri, two years later, did Yount realize that the years had been passing faster east of the Divide than on the west of it. They had come, but they were no longer children; and their mother was never coming. Believing Yount to be dead, she had remarried.

Morton Jackson
St. Joseph, Missouri

And there were those who made their fortune in the West merely by grubstaking others. There were no risks, and the profit was tremendous:

Dear Editor:

Nothing was too big to grow, in the West, or too fantastic to happen. Consider the rates of interest on a money loan. In one boomtown, where everybody was going to be a millionaire the day after tomorrow, if he could just scrape a few dollars together to tide him over today, the standard—and ungrumbled-at—interest rate was ten percent—compounded daily!

Arnold Healy
Independence, Missouri

That brings us to the end of the trail again, gents. We just haven't anymore space to roam in. But we'll be seein' you in our next issue, and in between times, get together your stories and we hope we'll be hearin' from you. *Adios!*

—THE EDITORS

SPECIAL

BOOK BARGAINS BEYOND COMPARE

BUILD YOUR OWN HOME—SAVE \$75 A DAY

Can you saw a board? Hammer a nail? Then you and your wife can build a beautiful new home in 20 weekends plus your 2-weeks vacation. And think of it—you can save \$75 a day while you're busy. What do you dream about—a ranch house, town house, modern? They're all here in Hugh Laidman's great book

"HOW TO BUILD YOUR OWN HOUSE." Only \$5. Order today . . .

CHILDBIRTH: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

by Carl Henry Davis, M.D.,
and Donita Ferguson

\$2.50

What is the truth about the new method of having a baby painlessly? Are premature babies invariably handicapped? This and so many other vital questions are answered in this remarkable book. Every expectant mother should have a copy.

SPECIAL— WHILE THEY LAST!

Reader's Treasury—

Heritage Press Edition

750 pages of unforgettable stories, novels, essays, poems by Somerset Maugham . . . Ring Lardner . . . Alexander Woolcott . . . A. E. Housman . . . James Thurber . . . Jack London . . . Damon Runyon . . . Carl Sandburg . . . many others.

Published at \$2.95

Special Price \$1.49

SPECIAL THIS MONTH— THE BIG MYSTERY CRIME PACKAGE

We will send you sight unseen four popular crime novels by famous writers, the selection to be made by our own staff. The published price of these will be at least \$10.00.

Special—this month only—\$2.98

CHICAGO, CONFIDENTIAL

The Lowdown on the Big Town

by Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer

A cheeky, impudent, uncensored account of the fast, fabulous city. Chicago is the burly-burly, rough-and-tumble, guns-and-girls front page hero town of the U.S. And so, while CHICAGO, CONFIDENTIAL is of vital importance to every Chicagoan, it will have enormous interest to every American.

\$3.00

THE UNTAMED

by Max Brand

\$2.00

Here's Max Brand's greatest Western yarn—the story of Whistling Dan Barry of the untamed soul, and the mighty black stallion, king of the ranges and the wolf dogs. If you collect Westerns, don't miss this one.

SPECIAL—JAMES T. FARRELL PACKAGE

2 Famous Novels—the Danny O'Neill Series

NO STAR IS LOST
MY DAYS OF ANGER

Pub. at \$3.96 . . . 1040 pages . . . The 2 Volumes Complete, \$1.98

WHILE THEY LAST—THREE GREAT NOVELS!

VERMILION by Idwal Jones

"A vintage novel . . . full-bodied and to the connoisseur's taste."—Prentice-Hall, Inc.

I WILL BE GOOD by Hester Chapman

"An original and deeply impressive book."—Houghton Mifflin

BARABBAS by Emery Bekey

Second large printing. Recommended by the Religious Book Club.

Pub. at \$8.25. 1296 pages. The three volumes, \$2.98

SAVE MONEY

Buy your books this new,
easy by-mail way!

Yes, order any book you want right from your own home. You'll get it promptly direct from New York (book center of the world) at no extra cost—free insurance and postage. Build your library this fast, easy, money-saving way. USE THIS COUPON.

THE FORSYTE SAGA

by John Galsworthy

\$2.98

This is the motion picture edition of one of the most interesting novels of all time. Yes, the picture that stars Errol Flynn, Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon, in book form—a big book, 921 pages complete, uncut. A rare opportunity while the limited supply lasts!

MAIL THIS COUPON WHILE SUPPLIES LAST!

Popular Publications, Dept. D,

205 E. 42nd St., N. Y. 17, N. Y.

Send me the books checked below. I enclose remittance of \$. . .

☐ James T. Farrell Package \$1.98	☐ Tales for Males, The Bedside Bonanza, Big Mystery Crime Package, \$2.98	} \$1.98
☐ How to Build Your Own House, \$5.00	☐ Vermilion, I Will Be Good, Barabbas	
☐ Childbirth, \$2.50	☐ Chicago, Confidential	} \$3.00
☐ The Untamed, \$2.00		
☐ Reader's Treasury, \$1.49		
☐ The Forsythe Saga, \$2.98		

Name
Address
City Zone State



"Here, Pledger," Bowen
said as he stepped out. . . .

DEATH CROWDS MY SIXES



A Novel By STEVE FRAZEE

CHAPTER ONE

Gunstrong Range

FOR MORE than two months the blazed nose of Street Bowen's dun had thrust a devious course three hundred miles across one state and deep into another. Bowen had stirred for information patiently and gently all the way, and now he had a hunch that he was closing.

Even a hunted man, he thought, would tarry a spell in Hangman's Park. A slow

Bowen's death-laden sixes gave him a vengeance stranger than bullets that gunlit night—as he traded his life for the life of a man he had ridden from the grave to kill!

smile streaked white across the clear brown of his face, and for the first time in weeks he missed the tight feeling of caked dust and the gritty taste of dust upon his lips. This was land where grass whispered high against the legs of the dun, a country of rolling hills hard-locked by blue mountains all around.

Park, they called it. Why, the danged thing was anyway fifty miles long and twenty wide. The amber wine of approaching fall was in the air. Cattle here, a chunky brand of red and whites that were not run in Bowen's country, were in prime condition.

The day and the country were not suited to the violence that would have to come before he had finished his business with Scott Ripley. The thought brought a hardness to Bowen's gray eyes and straightened him out of an easy slouch to watch the country from an altered viewpoint. He was a lean, brown man in weathered clothes that had soaked in the scent of many far campfires. He was wedged from wide shoulders down to the saddle. The long, flat muscles of his legs were built for the barrel of a horse.

Across the somewhat sharp features of a face that might ordinarily have carried flashing humor lay a calmness that, if carried too long, would be deadly grimness.

He slipped his gunbelt around a trifle so that his holster rode farther forward on his thigh. Hangman's Park was still the most beautiful cattle country he had ever seen—but he was not thinking of it now.

In mid-afternoon, from the edge of an aspen thicket atop one of the rolling hills, he saw some of the inhabitants of Hangman's Park—and he did not like what he saw. Where a board shack had stood near a little jeweled chain of beaver dams below, eighteen people had set themselves against two.

The shack was on its side. Riders had

ropes on sections of the flimsy walls. The screech of nails and popping of dry boards came up to Bowen. He saw a man take his time running a rope around puncheon flooring that still showed green undersides, and then the man set his horse against the weight and scattered flooring across the yard.

No one down there was talking. An immense man with grizzled bangs of shaggy hair showing in front of a pushed-back black hat sat on a white horse that shone like wet satin. He seemed to be in charge, for now and then he nodded or pointed. Beside him on a coal-black stallion was a girl whose hair was honey-colored in the sun. The black was giving her trouble, rearing at each new burst of cracking lumber, but she was handling him expertly, meanwhile watching the wreckers.

Seventeen men and one girl. That was one side; the other was composed of two people, a straight-backed man standing beside a gray-haired woman who held something round and darkly glistening in one hand.

At first glance it looked to Bowen like the old story of cattle against the plow, but he looked long and well and saw another story that he could not understand. The silvered aspen of an old corral that had been repaired and enlarged held eight or nine yearlings. The soil around the shack had never felt the thrust of a plowshare, and the very stance of the straight man standing by the woman said cowman, not nester.

Before the cinching of his rig began to creak as he started down the hill, Bowen told himself that this was just one of those things that left the hard, metallic taste of disgust in a man's mouth, but it was none of his business. No local issue in Hangman's Park must come between him and his deadly mission.

He heard someone speak unhurriedly when he rode from the aspens. All action

below stopped. Except for the soft thump of the dun's hooves on deep sod and little squeaks of leather, there were no sounds as Bowen went toward the group. He crossed a little creek and stopped behind the couple whose home was a twisted wreck.

The woman did not look around. She was holding a black teapot, Bowen observed, and she was staring at the girl on the stallion. Hope that had risen in the dark eyes of the man beside her flicked out after a searching appraisal of the newcomer. *Husband and wife*, Bowen thought. The man was older than he had looked from the hill, a powerful, erect fellow who might be close to sixty. Unstreaked Indian-black hair and the faint mark of Indian in the bold lines of his wide face gave Bowen the quick impression that this man had more natural right to be where he was than the men who opposed him.

Again Bowen reminded himself that this was not his business. Scott Ripley might be in the group, and Ripley was his business.

"You got anything to say about it, brother?" The challenge came from the man who had disemboweled the bottom of the shack by ripping out the puncheon poles. He let his words roll hard and flat as he stared at Bowen.

BOWEN looked him over. He saw a deep-chested man who stood about six feet, a man with arrogance and authority written in the set of his face and tone of his voice. The crisp curls of yellow sideburns came well below the fellow's ears. He undoubtedly had a mop of that taffy under his white Stetson, Bowen thought, and was very proud of it.

He wasn't Scott Ripley, however. Bowen looked away from him casually to run his scrutiny around the group, and the insult brought a quick edge to the

man's temper. His blunt, hard face clouded.

"I asked you a question, stranger!"

Bowen had not had time to study all the men. He knew Ripley by description only. Now he was forced back to Taffy-Hair. The man might have been right handsome, Bowen thought, if there hadn't been a tight curl of meanness around his mouth and too much flare to his ears. That was the idea of those sideburns, to keep the ears from sticking out so nakedly.

"Judson! He's just a saddlebum. We'll talk to him later. Get on with what we have to do." The girl on the stallion spoke crisply.

Bowen shot a quick look in her direction, observing two things—that she was beautiful in a country that was hard on beauty of any kind, and that she had taken decision away from the gray-haired man on the white horse. That man had been about to do or say something, and now he seemed relieved.

"I asked him a question!" Judson did not look around. "He's going to answer!"

"Judson! You heard what I said!" the girl called.

"He doesn't look like a saddlebum to me, Miss Judy." Judson shook his head. "He could be a sneaking government land office spy. He's going to answer my question."

Too many men were watching and Judson had gone too far to take orders from a woman now, Bowen realized, regretting that he had allowed himself to be drawn so far into the thing because of an instant dislike of Judson. But he could still crawl out. He looked at the ruined shack, at the couple standing straight and defiant, and then he glanced at the number against them and did not want to crawl out.

"Mind if I swing down, mister?"

Bowen asked the question of the man whose home was smashed and who undoubtedly had been ordered to leave the country. It brought a sharp glint of sur-

prize and appreciation to the Indian-touched countenance.

"Light down," the man said, and just a flicker of new hope came to his face. But it passed, and the dark features were stolid and unreadable again.

On the ground, Bowen pushed his gun-belt around and took his time about stomping saddle kinks out of his legs. "Likely looking country here," he murmured to no one in particular. From the corner of his eye he saw a hellish fury building on Judson's face, and he saw that men directly back of Judson were moving to the sides of the short, hard line of trouble. As if there were no hurry, one cowboy who had been sitting in the shade of his horse came up from the ground lithely and led his mount to one side. Bowen had just a tick of time in which the man's profile registered clean and sharp. His heart leaped and he wanted to look more closely at the fellow, but there was no time.

Judson said, "Answer the question I asked you."

With his right hand lifted just a trifle from the full drop of his arm's length, Bowen studied Judson's fair face. "Simple reason tells me this isn't any of my business—Batwings."

The epithet did it. Judson's face drained white. He was on the high point and hell rode through him at the reference to his ears and gunsmoke was ready to burst from brass. But the instant passed and a veil came down over the man's blue eyes. It might have been fear. It just might have been, Bowen thought.

Judson let out a long breath. "Why didn't you say so when I asked you?" He smiled so suddenly and completely that Bowen was left staring in disbelief to think a face could change so fast. Judson turned away then, as if something of no importance had just flicked past him. "Get on with it, boys!"

There was not much left to do to the

house, and after a while the gray man on the white horse said in a deep voice, "That'll be enough!" He rode forward, and the girl came with him.

She looked down at Bowen and he saw an interest in her eyes that had not been there when she called him a saddlebum. Weather had tinted her skin a creamy tan and burned the upturned edges of wavy hair and left a splash of freckles across the bridge of a straight nose. She smiled at Bowen and said, "Not many men call my foreman as you did."

"Is that a fact?" Bowen tried to peer around the gleaming stallion to get another look at the man whose profile he had seen moments before. He could not find the fellow.

High wilfulness and irritation had raised in the girl's eyes when Bowen again looked up at her. She resented the least inattention, he concluded. It pleased him that he had annoyed her. She was on the wrong side here.

The gray man on the white, wide and heavy in the saddle, looked down at Bowen over a huge, pocked nose. "The Ladder can use you, son," he rumbled. "You're looking for a job, of course." It was more an order than a question.

"Broken Bit can use—" Judy said.

"Broken Bit is way over-hired now," the old man said. He considered some personal extension of that thought and it brought a momentary expression of doubt and uncertainty to his fleshy face. "You ride up to the Ladder, son. I'm Jason Jay. You talk to me about a job." He nodded. "Yeah. You do that."

As far as Jay was concerned, that settled it. He seemed to forget Bowen then, without ever giving him a chance to speak. Looking from the girl to the Ladder owner, Bowen saw how Jay's curt lack of consideration of her unfinished thought had gone against the grain. Resentment flared brightly in Judy's eyes, but it went quickly. She could give in on

a small point now and then, Bowen decided, and suddenly got a far-reaching hunch about what might be going on in Hangman's Park. But that had nothing to do with the business that had brought him; and yet he knew that he was being squeezed into another fight.

Judy suddenly moved her horse away and went to where the woman with the teapot was standing, gaunt and silent.

"I'm sorry about this, Mrs. Hangman, but your husband was warned again and again. Jason and I have arranged with the bank at Blue Spruce to pay you more than enough to get out of the country. It's not, you understand, for any imaginary right you have to this land—"

"Keep your money," Mrs. Hangman said tonelessly. "You're the worst of the lot, Judy Bridger. Get off our property."

"Your property?" A faint tinge colored Judy's face. She started to say more, then quickly wheeled the stallion and rode away.

Bowen saw her stop briefly at the corral, where most of the Broken Bit and Ladder riders had gathered. She said something to Judson. He touched the brim of his hat with his hand, and then the girl went racing west up the park, her fair hair flying.

"The worst of the lot," Mrs. Hangman muttered.

Jason Jay was looking at the woman's husband, and getting nothing in return but the blank stare of a man equipped by heritage with complete control of facial expression.

"You knew better, Hangman," Jay said. "I kept going out of my way to warn you. You knew it was coming."

HANGMAN nodded stonily. He raised a long arm and pointed toward the corral, where men had let down the bars and were hazing out the yearlings.

"Easier than trying to drive them to

Blue Spruce to sell," Jay said. "The money is there for you—for every head you had here and on my range."

It struck Bowen that Jay might ordinarily be a fair and honest man, but now he had set a course. Even if he suspected error in it he would meet resistance with anger which would bolster his weakness to help convince him he was right.

"We will not be driven," Hangman said.

Bowen's guess was right. Jay went to anger, cold and sudden. "Get clear, Hangman, while you're still in one piece. I can't be responsible for your stubbornness any longer!"

"Our land," Hangman said softly. "We stay."

"It's on your head, then!" Jay shouted.

"Judy Bridger," Mrs. Hangman said, looking at her husband. "She twists them all around her finger."

"I'm done with talk!" Jay whirled his horse and started away. Six men were coming on foot from the corral, among them Judson, the Broken Bit ramrod.

"Where do we take the cattle, boss?" one asked the blocky rancher.

"Run 'em into the bunch on Salt Creek Meadows," Jay said. "They're paid for—and so is any man that comes after them."

It was then Bowen saw the man he wanted. The dodgers he had studied, the information he had got from those who knew Scott Ripley had not been too clear, he knew, but there was no mistaking the slender build, the droopy-cornered eyes. Those facts, with the one split-second glance he had seen of the man's profile, left no doubt that here was the man for whom he had made the long ride.

Bowen had no authority but the gun on his thigh. He had no plan or even hope of taking Ripley back alive. The endless days of patient trailing, the nights beside far, lonely fires, had put a hard shell around the resolve that had sent

him after Ripley. Now Bowen had to take the man the only way there was to take him.

The time did not run long. Jay rode away, not knowing what lay at his back. Two of the six men on the ground turned back toward the corral. Two more started, but Judson, shrewdly reading the burning look that Bowen had fixed on Ripley, said softly, "Wait a minute, boys."

Jarred to quick awareness by the tense run of Judson's voice, the last two men swung around and weighed the situation they had overlooked by seconds. They set themselves, taking their cue from Judson. Ripley, slender, straight, stared steadily at Bowen. Behind the arches of the droopy-cornered green eyes ran a quick and startled burst of new intelligence, saying plainly that Ripley knew the mission of the lone rider who had come to Hangman's Park.

Four, Bowen thought. Men who knew had warned him that Ripley alone might be too many.

"Scott Ripley?" he asked.

Ripley hesitated, and then he nodded slightly and death held a sharp lance poised where five silent men stood in the bright sun of the rolling park. There had to be a move, the changing of expression, the gathering tension of a muscle, any flick of motion or suspected motion to start the thing.

Ripley moved his head. He shook it. "No," he said to Bowen. "No, Bowen, you haven't got a show." And then he turned his back and walked away and left a hole with two men flanking one side of it and Judson on the other side.

Judson's blue eyes were puzzled just an instant. Then they shrouded down to trenchant calculation. The other two men were caught by the sudden shift, scowled in confusion and looked to Judson for another cue.

"Ripley!" Bowen called. "Ripley, turn around!"

Ripley went on walking. Tensed to go forward and force the issue, even though it meant putting his back to Judson and the other two, Bowen never got started. A powerful hand clamped his shoulder and drew him backward off balance.

"Easy, Bowen, easy. It's stacked too high against you."

Hangman's face was bleak and dark. His hand was like the clamp of steel on Bowen's left shoulder. He did not let go until Ripley had swung up on a sorrel with four white stockings and ridden away.

Judson's eyes were tight. His mouth opened just enough to let his words out. "Any tin under that shirt, stranger?"

"No," Bowen said, glancing at Ripley's receding figure. "Not that it's any of your business."

"It would be," the Broken Bit foreman said evenly. "In this park we take care of our riders. We kill our own snakes, Bowen." Judson looked at Hangman.

There was a savageness in Bowen now, the crisping anger of frustration and defeat. He looked once more at Ripley galloping away through the bright grass. "You must keep pretty busy then, Judson."

"We keep busy," Judson said. He licked the corner of his mouth. "Old Jase hired you, Miss Judy said."

"He offered me a job."

"Uh-huh. It's best on this range to be working at Broken Bit or Ladder—or not be on this range, Bowen. You riding up with us?"

Ripley had gone over a hill and was out of sight.

"Maybe I'll rest the dun right where I am for a few days," Bowen said.

The pair beside Judson tensed. Without looking at them Judson raised one hand in a quieting gesture. "Poor company here, Bowen," he said, looking at Hangman. "And the company won't be here overnight, I'd say."

"Come back and find out," Hangman said.

One of Judson's companions said, "We're being soft all the way through on this, Cal. I'd say we ought to—"

"My problem, Pledger," the Broken Bit foreman said. He touched his hat to Mrs. Hangman, smiled, and took his men away.

CHAPTER TWO

Hangman's Job

THREE PEOPLE stood beside the wrecked house. In the distance, Hangman's yearlings bawled. A rider streaked out from the group surrounding them and turned back one that sought to return to the corral. Sunlight played in little ringlets on the beaver ponds, and the same breeze that had rippled the water ran on to chase another across the sea of grass.

Deep in Hangman's eyes a bitterness began to break through the impassive surface of his dark face. With the teapot cradled in both hands, his wife, gaunt and gray, stood quietly until the last rider had gone from view, and then she said, "My great-grandmother owned this teapot. There's a belief in my family that as long as it's taken proper care of, any home it's in will be sound."

Hangman grunted. "It seems to've lost its charm."

"What are a few broken boards?" the woman scoffed. "Boards don't make a home nohow. Now you dig into that mess, Maxwell, and we'll get ourselves and this boy something to eat. We got our land, we got the teapot. The house was no good anyhow. I'll have a new one here within two weeks."

The fierce, strong current of Mrs. Hangman's spirit and determination steadied Bowen. He had been mouthing

the foul taste of failure to do what he had come hundreds of miles to do, but now he turned his mind from himself to the problems of the Hangmans. He took care of the dun, and then he helped Maxwell Hangman sift through the wreckage for what could be salvaged.

The three ate a little later near a campfire in the yard.

"You saved me from getting gunned down," Bowen said to the dark-faced rancher. "Still, I think I would have got Ripley before they finished me."

"Maybe," Hangman said. "A dead man ain't no help to anybody."

"I'm glad to hear that," his wife said. "You sang a different tune when I threw your rifle out the window just as we saw that gang coming."

Hangman grunted, but his wise, dark eyes smiled briefly at his wife.

"This park—" Bowen said. "It's named for you?"

"My grandfather," Hangman said. "He was one of the Mountain Men who first wintered here." He swept his arm toward the rolling grassland. "This heaved with buffalo once, and the beaver ponds ran end to end for miles." Something fierce and lonely, a reaching back toward freedom gone, coursed across Hangman's face, and for a moment all his Indian blood was on the surface.

"Ma and me always wanted to come out here after the kids were raised. We got six boys." Hangman scowled at the cooking fire. "Town people."

"Good boys," the woman said stoutly. "Times change, that's all. If the boys knew we needed help—"

"We need no help. We'll make it on our own. We always have." Hangman glanced at Bowen as if apologizing for his wife's interruption. "We came out here because the lower half of this park is still open land—legally. We filed on all we could. We don't want much, just enough for a little ranch where we can make a

living and watch the sunsets till the last big one."

His wife nodded. She began to gather up the dishes in a dented, twisted pan.

"I think Jason Jay would not have made trouble," Hangman said. "He's getting old. He knows he's going up the last mountain. Not that he and Broken Bit haven't run everybody out of the park who ever tried to settle here, but now Jay is old and he feels the snowbird walking on his grave."

Hangman shook his unstreaked mane. "No, I think Jay would have let us alone with our little herd, but Broken Bit would not have it that way—so Jay had to go along."

"That girl—Judy Bridger—you think she's behind this?" It did not seem to Bowen that such could be.

"She was here, wasn't she?" Mrs. Hangman asked, and then she took her dishes toward the creek.

"I don't know," Hangman was dubious. He stared at Bowen with a basic male reluctance to admit the quality of hard, direct action in a woman. "It's a man's country, but still that girl..." Hangman stared in the direction the visitors had gone.

"She runs Broken Bit alone?" Bowen asked.

Hangman nodded. "Her father's old foreman is there with his wife, but this Judson has been her range boss for a year or two, I gather." Hangman rose suddenly, with the impatience of a man unused to talking at length or remaining quiet very long. "You came for this Ripley fellow?"

"He killed my father."

The Indian in Hangman ran stark and glittering in his black eyes. "I should not have touched your shoulder."

"Ripley is still here. I am still alive, thanks to you."

Mrs. Hangman came back from the creek. She had scoured the dishes with

sand, and now she put them in the pan of water on the fire. "I can't abide grease on dishes," she said. If she had not declared herself before, the calmness of her face now said that she was staying.

FROWNING, Bowen rolled a cigarette slowly. The Hangmans could not stay. They had no chance. Jay's patience had run out. The next time riders came down the valley, it was unlikely that either Jay or Judy Bridger would be with them, and it was certain that Hangman would fight. He had found his rifle on the trampled sod and was standing with it now, looking up the park. Bowen rose and went over to him.

"Have you talked to anyone in the government land office?"

"That's a four-day ride. It would do no good. Others have tried. The man who built this shack went to the land office to complain that he had been ordered out of the park. Someone in the land office told him to make his complaint to the sheriff of this county. Three fourths of the county is over the range in mining country, and the sheriff there has always said that Hangman's Park can handle its own affairs."

"But the man went there—Masters was his name. The sheriff told him it was a government matter." Hangman shrugged. "Someone killed Masters on his way home across Broken Bit range, at the head of Sunny Boy Creek."

"You knew all this when you tried to settle here?"

"We knew. Masters wasn't the first." Hangman flicked a crushed blade of grass from the barrel of his eight-square Sharps. "We have a right here."

So had Masters, Bowen thought. He had to accept what his instincts told him he could not avoid from the time he had looked down on the scene from the edge of aspens an hour or so before. He was in this thing now up to his neck.

Bowen went back to where Mrs. Hangman was drying dishes. She had found a broken box and was placing them in it carefully.

"Where's your horses?" he asked.

"That gang ran 'em somewhere down the park when they rode in. We'd be beholden to you if you'd round—"

"I'll find them," Bowen said. "The money Jay and Judy Bridger left at the Blue Spruce bank will bring out lumber for a new house, won't it?"

"So I been thinking."

"I'll help you build it."

"Maxwell can throw a shack together. I've done it myself."

"Your husband won't be here."

Mrs. Hangman paused just an instant in her work.

"He's going to Blue Spruce and wire the governor, and from there he's going to the land office in Baxter."

"The governor is a big cattleman. He won't help and we don't need his help if he would."

"You need help wherever you can get it. The governor happens to be square. He'll try to jar some action out of the government land office boys."

"It will be the first time. I like the part about building a new house the best."

"You've got what it takes," Bowen said. "But you've also got the brains to know that by ourselves we'll wind up like Masters. Let's get your husband in the clear for a while. Nobody will bother you here alone, and I'll have time to see if I can't work out something."

"You've no cause to be in this thing, young man."

"I'm in it," Bowen said. "And I'll take care of my own business at the same time. Can you persuade your husband to leave now?"

"Maxwell is bullheaded, but he ain't dumb, and he favors law as long as it works. He'll go."

Bowen nodded. "I'll round up your

horses and go to Blue Spruce with you to help bring back the lumber."

"Don't mind. I've driven a wagon, youngster. And it just strikes me that I got a little business of my own in Blue Spruce—something my husband don't need to know about."

As Bowen rode away to find the horses he looked back at the erect figure of Maxwell Hangman staring out on land where his ancestors had moved as freely as the air, and wondered if Mrs. Hangman knew how to sell his idea to her husband.

She did. When Bowen returned with the horses Hangman looked at him from deepset eyes and said, "I don't much favor leaving on a goose chase, Bowen, but Ma has made me promise." His dark eyes glittered with doubts and questions, but he did not speak them.

He and Bowen saddled the horses, two wiry animals with the black spine stripe of mustang blood, and then Hangman hesitated, balancing his heavy Sharps in a huge, long-fingered hand. "Ma will be all right." He nodded. "But if you can, you'll look in once in a while?"

"I will." Bowen guessed what lay in Hangman's mind. If his wife was touched while he was gone, one by one Broken Bit and Ladder men would die, at lonely fires, when a gun crashed from ambush, on a trail, from a knife stroke in the dark of ranchhouse yards. Maxwell Hangman would revert completely to the solid strain of Indian in his blood.

But he could not win his dream of living peacefully and one day going with the sunset long on the tall grass of the park named for his ancestor if he turned to violence based on vengeance. There could be only one ending.

The thought brought Bowen around to his own reason for being where he was. Vengeance for his father gunned down in the course of duty. He had never paused to doubt that he was doing what a man had to do when he started the long ride

to run down Scott Ripley. And still he did not doubt that he was right, but he compared his cause to the dream of a right to a way of life that the Hangmans were fighting for, and found that his own personal quarrel did not go as deeply into the banks of human justice as it might have.

Bowen was confused and half angry at himself for a moment, but he did not change his mind about going on with what he must do.

Hangman glanced to where his wife was digging in the sod with a broken shovel. He looked keenly at Bowen.

"You did not face Judson down today, Bowen. He stopped because you gave him a way to stop. There is no fear in the man. Remember that."

Hangman led the horses to where his wife was kneeling on the sod. He watched her place the teapot carefully in a hole, replace the sod, and give it a final pat.

"There!" the woman said. "It will be there, and so will I, when you come back."

Bowen watched them ride away with the sun slanting on their backs. Hangman was carrying his rifle across the saddle. Bowen shook his head. How a couple like that could have raised townsmen sons was more than he could understand. He looked at the wreckage strewn around him and was acutely anxious to be gone from it. Mrs. Hangman was right. Boards did not make a home, and so the shattering of them had not destroyed a home.

CHAPTER THREE

Rangelord's Plan

AT SUNSET Bowen rode past Hangman's yearlings thrown in with a herd in a lush bottom where a stream flowed crookedly between two flat-topped hills. One man was with the herd. In camp on one of the hills, four

men came to the edge of timber and watched Bowen pass.

The M Bar H brand was fresh and big on Hangman's cattle—and there they were with a Ladder herd. The old couple, Bowen thought, probably had just bought the yearlings and hadn't even had a chance to turn them on the range.

He went on through country where the flat-topped, timber-crowned hills came more frequently. Ladder or Broken Bit, it did not make much difference. If he reached Ladder first, he wanted to talk to Jason Jay. If he came to Broken Bit he wanted a private talk with the old foreman Hangman had mentioned.

He came to Ladder at dusk, under a long-timbered hill that would break the sweep of winter wind. It struck him, looking at the huge log ranch house and sprawling corrals, that this place was old, probably running back to Indian times.

The first man he saw was one of the pair who had flanked Ripley in the show-down that had not quite come off. The fellow came out of the dark door of a hay barn, cradling a rifle. It was he that Bowen had marked for his second shot that afternoon, for the man, heavy-set, deliberate of movement, had stacked up, next to Ripley, as the most dangerous of the four who had waited for action. Pledger, Judson had called him.

"Lucky you came to see Jay before someone went out to bring you in," Pledger said.

Pledger had taken orders from Judson, foreman of another spread. That was something to remember, Bowen thought. He said, "I came to see Jay." Before he swung down he observed two other men with rifles lounging near the corners of the main corral.

As he went across the yard he saw men through the lighted windows of the bunkhouse, but there was no loud talk or singing or hoorawing going on in there. Jason Jay had set out pickets and there

was tension at the Ladder, Bowen considered. That fitted into the pattern of what he was building from little bits of things heard and seen that afternoon.

He reached the ranch house porch and someone spoke from the shadows of a deep chair, "No one goes inside with gun on, cowboy. Just rest yourself a spell and we'll see if you go in at all." The man came from the shadows and went inside.

Before the door closed with a soft thud that spoke of tremendous weight, Bowen caught a glimpse of Jason Jay, wearing spectacles, sitting by a fireplace in a large, bright room beamed with hand-hewn cedar.

Somewhere in the shadows of the porch, a man cleared his throat softly. "Just as well hang that gunbelt on the rail while you're waiting, Bowen."

Unarmed, Bowen went inside a little later, after the first man came out and

nodded curtly. Jay had taken his glasses off. There had been the marks of drive and vitality on him when he sat a saddle that afternoon, but in this pleasant room he was an old man slumped in a chair. But still his eyes were keen and watchful as Bowen crossed the room.

"You came for the job, huh, Bowen?"

"Maybe."

"Gunslinger?"

"No."

"That's good. I've no use for a gunhandy man. Too many of them in the park now." Jay heaved himself around in his chair, and then settled right back where he had been. "You didn't like what you saw today, did you?"

"I didn't like it."

Jay looked above the fireplace, where a long muzzle-loader rested on pegs. "My father held this land against Indians. I lost my two sons, Bowen, when a hard-case outfit from Texas tried to move in



ooo

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"HE'S GOT LADDIE BOY in check all right, but not Dry Scalp. My, what unkempt hair! Looks like a mane . . . and I'll bet it's as hard to comb. Loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"

*Hair looks better...
scalp feels better...
when you check Dry Scalp*



IT'S GREAT! Try it! See what a big difference 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic makes in the good looks of your hair. Just a few drops daily check loose dandruff and those other annoying signs of Dry Scalp . . . spruce up your hair quickly and effectively. Contains no alcohol or other drying ingredients.

Vaseline HAIR TONIC
TRADE MARK ®

Listen to DR. CHRISTIAN,
starring JEAN HERSHOLT,
on CBS Wednesday nights.

here. Old Penny Bridger, the father of the girl you saw today, died two years ago from a bullet he'd carried from a fight twenty years ago, when we turned back another bunch of land-grabbers.

"This park is staying like it always was—two outfits. Hangman—I had nothing against him. My father knew his grandfather well, hunted with him many times. But if one new spread gets a hold here, there'll be another and then another."

"Hangman never would have got big enough to hurt you any," Bowen said.

Jay smiled bleakly. "That's what the Indians thought when the first settler planted himself. No, Bowen, no. Ladder and Broken Bit are enough."

Bowen knew that he had not been accepted as a casual rider looking for a job, or else Jason Jay would not have felt a need to explain his stand.

The old man was staring into the flames when he asked a question, but when it struck he was studying Bowen with brutal sharpness.

"What does the land office think about it, Bowen?"

Bowen smiled. "I couldn't say. Wrong guess, Jay."

After a while the old rancher nodded. "It was." He raised his voice. "Bonney!"

The outside door opened and the man who had first spoke to Bowen on the porch stepped in. He was a lean, hatchet-faced man with gray against his temples.

"Send Penrose in here," Jay ordered.

"He ain't here," Bonney said.

Jay grunted. "Now where the hell—"

"He went to Broken Bit," Bonney said.

"That Judy girl again," Jay muttered.

"Send him in here when he gets back. The damned fool is playing right into their hands."

Bonney went out. Jay scowled at Bowen. "Sit down. You can't go anywhere till I give the word, anyway."

They did not have to wait long. Out-

side, from somewhere down by the corrals, Bowen heard a challenge and an answer. A little later boots thumped on the porch, and then Scott Ripley came into the room. He was wearing his gun.

This time, because he was not armed and could not call the showdown, Bowen sized Ripley up as a man instead of a target. He was not a bad looking fellow, at that. In spite of the down-droop at the corners of his eyes, he had a clear, forceful look about him. But so did lots of killers.

Hunched in his chair, with firelight gleaming on the tousled bangs of gray hair, Jason Jay swung his heavy head to study in turn the two men before him.

"Why do you want Penrose, Bowen?" Jay asked.

"Penrose?"

"Yes, damn it! Penrose Jay, my nephew. You were going to make gun-play this afternoon, I hear. Why?"

Bowen and Penrose, or Ripley, stared steadily at each other. "He knows why I want him," Bowen said.

"Before you sent for me I was riding with a crowd of rustlers, Uncle Jase," the nephew said.

"Oh, hellfire!" the old man snorted. "Is that all there is to it?" He glared at Bowen. "So you're a tinhorn lawman, huh?"

Bowen shook his head. "I came on personal business with your nephew."

"All right," the old man said. "You and Penrose can settle it sometime when it won't bother me, but if you came with a badge, Bowen, you came to the wrong country to practice. Now go outside and tell Tex Bonney I hired—"

"To hell with your job." Bowen was still staring at Penrose Jay. "That's all you're going to say, huh?"

"That's all I got to say."

Bowen cursed the fact that he had been forced to leave his gun outside. Penrose Jay had ridden with a gang of rustlers,

sure enough, and one day they had decided to turn to quicker and easier money. Bowen's father, Marshal Shepherd Bowen, and his deputy, had caught them on the bank steps coming out, four of them. When it was over the deputy was badly wounded. Bowen's father was dead. Only one of the gang had got away, the horse-holder, and it was he who had killed Shepherd Bowen while he lay on the ground with a wound that was not too serious.

"I guess you'd better leave the Ladder, Bowen," Jason Jay said. "You got your horns dropped on a personal matter, and I already got enough trouble here. Bonney!"

The hawk-faced man came in.

"Bowen is riding out," old Jay said.

Bowen stopped at the corner of the main corral long enough to ask the direction of Broken Bit. "I'll tell you," the guard said, "but if you don't already know, it ain't likely you'll be welcome there."

AN HOUR later Bowen made dry camp on a timbered hill. He rolled in with a sense of failure riding him. Twice now he had been face to face with the man he had come to kill, and the man was still alive. Before he went to sleep he was struggling to switch his thoughts to the Hangmans. He had promised to help them, and here he could not handle his own affairs. There was hell brewing in Hangman's Park, and he seemed helpless before it.

Shortly after sunrise he rode into Broken Bit. Like the other ranch in the park, it was under a flat-topped hill, with the evidence of its long history evident in a straggle of old log buildings that had been abandoned or converted to store-rooms when the present huge ranch house had been located closer to the hill.

It seemed at first that the place was deserted, and then he saw a stringy man

come from a cabin that might have been the original structure on Broken Bit. While the fellow filled a pipe automatically, he stood staring out across the grassland to where part of the crew were tiny figures riding away in the morning sun.

Bowen went around a series of corrals that shielded him from the view of anyone at the ranchhouse. If his hunch was good, the man at the cabin was the old foreman who had been replaced by Judson. Bowen was sure when he caught a glimpse of a woman inside the cabin.

"You're the ramrod?" Bowen asked.

A trace of brooding bitterness crossed the stringy man's face. He was along in years, Bowen observed, but not too old to ride, not a bit older than Bonney at the Ladder.

"I'm Bruce Randall. Swing down, stranger."

"You *were* the topscrew?"

Curiosity and caution showed on Randall's face. "I was," he said. "What's your business, mister? Maybe you better go on up to the house and—"

"I want to see you," Bowen said.

"Say it then."

"It was never Penny Bridger's idea that there be only one spread in Hangman's Park, was it?"

Bowen saw Randall's mind run on to several sharp surmises. "Who are you?" Randall asked. "The man at Hangman's yesterday?"

Bowen nodded.

"You best go on up to the house, mister."

Randall's wife came to the door, a gray-haired, sturdy woman with the mark of long years of ranch life on her face. She looked searchingly at Bowen, and he knew that she had heard his questions.

"It seems to me that Broken Bit could grow so big that a woman couldn't run it at all," Bowen said. "If that happened a man would have to step in, wouldn't

he—and it might be the wrong man, wouldn't you say?" Bowen gambled on his knowledge that a man and wife can pass a world of intelligence in a quick glance.

The Randalls did, and what Bowen saw in their eyes confirmed what he had pieced together of the situation at Broken Bit.

"You better go up to the house, mister," Randall said. Then he murmured, "Best of all, see Penrose Jay."

Bowen heard the thump of boots on hard earth and turned to see Cal Judson striding toward him. Mrs. Randall's face stiffened. Her husband's eyes narrowed.

"The wrong man, say?" Bowen murmured. He read their faces, and had all he wanted from the Randalls.

"You always come in the back way, Bowen?" Judson came up with an angry tightness in his eyes. "What does he want with you?" he asked Randall.

"Ask him," the ex-foreman said.

"Remember, Randall, you're just living here because Miss Judy is soft-hearted. If I had my way—"

"You haven't—yet. Get away from our house," Randall said.

Judson smiled. "An old horse turned out on the range is only good to eat up grass from paying stock. Come on, Bowen."

Bowen picked up his reins and walked with Judson toward the ranch house.

"Been up to Ladder, Bowen?"

"You know I have."

"Didn't catch on there, huh?"

"To hell with Jason Jay."

Judson stopped by a blacksmith shop. He glanced toward the ranch house, then turned to Bowen. "You wanted old Jay's nephew pretty bad yesterday, didn't you?"

"You were there. You backed him, Judson."

"I might have been wrong. The Bit and Ladder take care of their own, but we don't want the park to become a hole

for long-riders. The chances are if you get what you came after you'll be moving on."

"The chances are."

Judson put a flat, hard look on Bowen, and Bowen, weighing all the little gravings and tiny movements that make a face, came to the conclusion that Maxwell Hangman had given him good advice. There was no fear at all in Judson, but there was a deal of cold, far-seeing craftiness.

"All right," the foreman said. "Three flat-tops west of where you camped last night is Signal Hill. Where the rocks are highest near the center of it in the timber, you'll have your man sometime this afternoon."

Bowen weighed that, tight-lipped and narrow-eyed.

"That's it," Judson said, his blue eyes hard as ice.

"Fair enough. This may help pay off: no later than the first of next week you're going to have some tough government men in this park investigating the Hangman deal. They were coming anyway, but now they'll come a little faster."

"You *know* that?"

Bowen nodded. "As well as you know where I camped last night."

SUSPICION, stark and deadly, hung fire in Judson's eyes, and for a few moments Bowen did not know whether he would ride freely from Broken Bit or have to fight his way out. Then Judson's lips curled in a tight smile. "We're somewhat alike, Bowen. It's just as well for you that you'll be riding after the deal this afternoon."

"Judson!" Judy Bridger called from the porch. Why do you do your business out there muttering instead of bringing the man to the house?"

Annoyance flashed in Judson's eyes, but when he turned he was smiling. "Sorry, Miss Judy, but Bowen didn't

want to come to the house. He was just leaving."

"Bring him here!"

"Yes, ma'am."

There was no more subservience in Judson than there was in a cat, Bowen thought, a fact which Judy, with her own imperious way, had overlooked. The girl had a brutal, jarring lesson coming to her soon, if things worked out.

Bowen walked to the porch with the foreman.

"What is it about Broken Bit you don't like, Mr. Bowen?" It surely could not be the owner, Judy's manner said. She looked at Bowen with frank interest.

He knew. He was new in the park, and the manner of his introduction had served to focus keen attention on him, and by not falling at the girl's feet the first time he saw her, he had roused a challenge in her. It would take quite a man to handle Judy Bridger, Bowen thought. He did not feel interested in the job or qualified.

"Broken Bit looks like a fine spread to me," he said. "But I've decided to go on west."

"Hire him, Judson."

"No thank you, Miss Bridger," Bowen said.

"Hire him, Judson!"

"I don't think I can. He said he wanted to go—"

The wilfulness of an uncurbed child burst on Judy's face. "Someday I'll have a foreman here who will obey my orders without question!"

"I do my best," Judson said with false humility.

Judy blew out a short breath in a gesture of disgust. She came down the steps, forcing both men to step quickly aside, and went striding toward the corrals. An amused and crafty expression touched Judson's face as he watched her go.

Bowen swung up on the dun.

"Remember to keep going—after this

PAL HOLLOW GROUND

Your Best Blade Buy!

Lasts longer · Shaves better · Costs less

PROVE IT YOURSELF AT OUR EXPENSE

Buy a package of PALS. Use as many as you wish. If you don't agree they're your best blade buy...more shaves, better shaves, at lowest cost...return the dispenser to us for full refund. (If your dealer can't supply you, send us his name and address. Order type blades wanted and enclose payment. We'll reimburse dealer.)

Pal Blade Co., Inc., Dept. P-9, 43 W. 57 St., New York 19



PAL
Hollow Ground like a barber's razor



Usual
Blade—ground like a jackknife

Fit your injector razor perfectly



PAL
INJECTOR BLADES
20 for 59¢
10 for 39¢ • 6 for 25¢
(Trial Size)

Double Edge



PAL
DOUBLE & SINGLE EDGE
in ZIPAK® dispenser
44 for 98¢
21 for 49¢ • 10 for 25¢

Single Edge



PAL single or double edge in regular packing, 4 for 10¢

afternoon, and if you can go," Judson said.

Judy Bridger was shouting at Judson about a horse that had not been properly rubbed down as Bowen rode away. She would shout just once too often at Judson, Bowen thought.

IN THE deep timber on Signal Hill Bowen waited, screened by ferns, and his gun was steady on the chest of Penrose Jay as the man came riding down a dim trail.

"Hold it, Jay!"

Jay's eyes jerked, then steadied. "Bowen?"

"Drop your gunbelt. Then get off the horse."

When Jay was on the ground, disarmed, Bowen went forward, ready to drop the man's horse on him if he tried to duck behind it and make a break. But Jay stood where he was and there was no fear in his eyes.

"Whatever we do in the next few days," Bowen said, "let it be understood that when it's over—I still want you."

"I understand that much of it."

You could trust this man, Bowen thought. It did not seem right, but the belief was in his mind.

"I see it this way," Bowen said. "Judy Bridger is blind with her own vanity and Judson has sold her a bill of goods about being a little empress in Hangman's Park, with the idea that he will be top man when it's over. She's too tied up with herself to realize that part of it. Your uncle went along on the Hangman thing against his will, but now he knows who's really out to gobble up this park. He sent for you because he was scared to death."

"I'm listening," Jay said.

"Judson told me you'd be here this afternoon. You were going to met Judy, weren't you?"

"That's right. Judson heard us make the date last night."

"I kill you and I have to run for it.

That takes care of plenty. You are standing in with Judy and might be able to influence her, and you are also the main force standing between Judson and the grabbing of the Ladder. And then Judson just may think I'm from the land of-ice after all."

"What do you figure to get out of this?" Jay asked.

"Two things—you, when it's over, and to help the Hangmans hold what's theirs."

Jay nodded. "I tried to talk my uncle out of jumping Hangman, but Judy beat me out."

"She pushed that?"

Jay nodded bleakly. "Judson helped crowd her into it, but still she gave the word. She just doesn't realize what she's doing. Judson does. He knows that neither the Bit nor the Ladder can hold the lower end of the park much longer. Losing that much range won't hurt either outfit a bit, but getting both Ladder and Broken Bit in trouble with the government will increase Judson's chances of coming out on top."

Bowen told Jay of the lie he had told the Broken Bit ramrod about government investigators. "They may come—some-day", Bowen said. "Hangman isn't leaving the country."

"I knew he wouldn't." Jay shook his head, looking speculatively at Bowen. "When I leave here alive and Judson finds out you're still alive, he'll know he's been taken in. Where you going to hide?"

"Somewhere in the aspen thickets north of the Hangman place. I'll want to know what's shaping up in the next few days, Jay."

"I'll find you there. You got grub?"

"Some."

"I'll bring more tomorrow night."

This being an ally of a man he had to kill put an odd hue on affairs, Bowen thought. Under different circumstances he would have liked Penrose Jay.

"How many Judson men at Ladder?" Bowen asked.

"Pledger is one. Two others, I think. I hired Pledger myself two weeks ago, but Judson has got to him since."

Somewhere down the dim trail twigs popped and there came the sound of a horse blowing.

"Judy." Jay picked up his gunbelt and strapped it on. "I didn't know a deputy would come this far to catch a rustler."

"I'm not a deputy, Jay, and I'm not concerned with what you did as a rustler. You know why—"

"I don't," Jay said. The approaching rider was not far away now. Jay hesitated, and then he picked up his reins and led his mount down the trail.

CHAPTER FOUR

Six-gun Settlement

FROM THE aspens above the Hangman place, Bowen lay with the cold barrel of a rifle before him and watched Ma Hangman at work on her new house. The walls were up, but the roof was still a large tarpaulin. For four days now Bowen had been on the dodge, but for several hours of two moonless nights, he had been able to sneak in and help the woman. Digging, carrying earth to the beaver ponds in buckets. If things worked out as Ma Hangman planned, Lord help the riders who went against that new shack.

This waiting was the hardest part. Three times Broken Bit men, sent out by Judson after he learned of the double-cross on Signal Hill, had come within a hair of getting Bowen. Penrose Jay had not come, but he had sent Randall, the ex-foreman of Broken Bit, and Randall had talked, confirming everything that Bowen had pieced together.

"Twelve of the seventeen hands at Bit are Judson men now," Randall had said.

"No telling how many he's got at Ladder. Judson figures to wipe out the Hangmans just before the government men get here—and somehow plant the blame on Ladder."

That was just about what Bowen had thought Judson would plan when he told the lie about government investigators.

"With Ladder bogged down in government trouble, Judson will have free play to work on the Bit. It's not beyond him to force marriage with Judy. That done, he'll whittle the Ladder to pieces and end up running this whole park," Randall said.

"Judy can't see that?"

"She's beginning to, I think, but she's still string-haltered by believing she can handle any man that ever walked," Randall gave his rifle to Bowen. "Wasn't for my wife, Bowen, I'd have killed Judson long ago. I may yet—if you and old Jay's nephew don't get this thing stopped."

That had been two days ago, and since then Bowen had no idea of what was shaping up at Broken Bit.

He tensed suddenly. A rider had come over the hill above the beaver dams and was headed toward the shack. He was in the yard and Ma Hangman was facing him with a rifle before Bowen recognized the fellow as Pledger, riding a horse with a Broken Bit brand.

That meant that things were heading up fast. The Jays had run Pledger away from Ladder, or else Judson had called him in.

Bowen put the bead of his rifle on the man, doubting the need, but making sure. Below, Ma Hangman pointed with her rifle. Pledger laughed and took the order, riding slowly, looking up at the trees that concealed Bowen. If he stopped at the end of the hill, or started up the hill. . . . But he did not. He rode slowly away in the direction of Broken Bit, not looking back.

The act made Bowen uneasy. The dun had not been off the hill to leave tracks since Bowen first rode in by night, but still the casual way that Pledger had surveyed the place left a tightness on Bowen's spine.

He spent an uneasy night, relieved only by the three hours he was helping Ma Hangman. Just before dawn he came wide awake and lay in his blankets listening. He could not be sure of what he heard, but when at daylight he saw the two pieces of lumber laid in an X near the shack below, he knew that it was not nerves that had roused him.

Nor was it nerves that caused him to draw his six-gun and step behind a tree a little later. The sound was hard to remember now. It might have been the brushing of a limb, the rattle of leaves when there was no wind to stir the gray-green aspens. For four days any little sound had been hot iron on coiled nerves.

Pledger came slowly along the edge of the hill, testing each step like a stalking cat. His gun was in his hand. His deepset eyes were wide with the strain of listening. He could not have passed without seeing Bowen, so Bowen did not wait.

"Here, Pledger," Bowen said and stepped out.

It seemed to Bowen that the man fired before his eyes moved. The bullet struck the tree beside Bowen and scattered shredded bark across his face. His gun was trained. He fired from instinct, unable to see at the moment, but he heard the explosive grunt that came from Pledger. An instant later, when he could see through the stinging lash of tears, he saw Pledger falling, open-mouthed.

Pledger was not dead, but he had caught the heavy slug low in the chest and the mark of death was gathering on his wide features. "Missed . . . once," he muttered.

After a while, with Pledger still alive, Bowen remembered to go to the edge of

the hill and show himself. Ma Hangman saw him, waved, and went back into the house.

On the hill above the beaver dams, a rider whirled from cover, looked over at Bowen, and sent his horse back into the trees, and far beyond the hill Bowen saw a group of riders coming hard across the grassland.

The pot had been opened, he thought grimly. He went back to see if there was anything he could do for Pledger, knowing that there was nothing to do.

He was standing there when he heard a horse crashing through the aspens. Penrose Jay was shouting his name, and Bowen guided him in with answers. Jay glanced at Pledger and then ran to the edge of the hill to look out at the oncoming riders.

"A few minutes yet," Bowen said. "We'll cover the back of the cabin from this hill."

"Good Lord, Bowen—two people in the shack—"

"The shack will take care of itself—if we can keep 'em from getting a place to shoot down on it. I think we can. Who's in that bunch?"

"Judson's picked men. I waited an hour too long to pick up the four he had at Ladder. They went away with six Ladder horses, including my uncle's prize white gelding."

"Uh-huh. Ladder horses to leave dead in the yard down there as evidence." Bown smiled. "Evidence for government men that may be here next month—or year."

Jay gave him an odd look. "Judson has had a man hanging out in Blue Spruce. Last night, according to old Randall, the man sore-footed a horse to report a coachful of land office men that just hit town."

"Is that a fact?" Bowen smiled, and then he remembered that he had just shot a man, and was smiling at a second who

must also taste lead. "When this is over, Jay, we still have something to settle."

"I'm still in the dark, Bowen. I knew you when I first saw you, because I'd seen you and your father around Sandrock—and I knew by your face what you wanted with me, but. . . ." Jay shook his head.

"When your gang, the five of you, hit the Sandrock bank two months ago, you were the only one that rode away—and you killed my father."

Jay's look was a long, dark stare. "Who said I did?"

There was always the same five in your rimrock gang. Four of them were killed in Sandrock. Who does that leave?"

I wasn't in Sandrock. The bunch talked some of trying the bank, but I wanted no part of it. This is the first I even knew they did it, because I had pulled out to come back here after my uncle wrote me."

"You were there, Jay."

Before I left, Pledger came into the bunch."

The two men stared steadily at each other.

"Ask him," Jay said. Quick fear crossed his face. "If he's still alive."

PLEDGER was alive. The clarity and seeming physical surge that deceives just before death was on him. When Bowen got off his knees after

hearing the few words the dying man said, he looked at Jay and broke out into a fearful sweat.

"I'm glad we're straight at last," Jay said. "We've got a job to finish down at Hangmans'."

They stationed themselves flat on the edge of the hill, and still there was a little time to wait.

Judson's men came through the aspens above the beaver ponds without pausing, and when they broke clear, Bowen saw three saddled horses that carried no riders. One of them was Jason Jay's satin-white gelding. Off the hill and straight across the creek they came. The men leading the riderless animals pulled them ahead and drove them then, and without a shot or shout the whole group surged straight at the shack, as if to trample it to bits by sheer power.

Bowen pushed Jay's rifle barrel down. "Hold it for now. They're going to make a wonderful target bunched that way."

Their first shot came from a rider who was urging the white gelding ahead of him. And then the shack exploded its answer. It made one sound, one crashing sound of rifles fired together. Two men went backward from their saddles. Another slumped and held hard to the horn. His horse whirled in terror and ran back toward the creek.

"Fall back to the creek!" Cal Judson's voice came up in a mighty roar to Bowen.

fast HELP for **HEADACHE** UPSET STOMACH - JUMPY NERVES

Today more people than ever before use Bromo-Seltzer. Because this time-proved product gives fast help. Not only for headache pain, but also for the upset stomach and jumpy nerves that often go with it.

Quick! Pleasant! Bromo-Seltzer effervesces with split-second ac-

tion, ready to go to work at once. And it is so refreshing! You must be satisfied or your money back! Caution: Use only as directed.

Get Bromo-Seltzer at your drug store fountain or counter today. It's a product of the Emerson Drug Co. since 1887.

WHERE
OTHERS
FAIL
BROMO-
SELTZER
WORKS



The Broken Bit ranrod was standing high in the stirrups, swinging one arm. He forged some order out of the confusion that had shocked his men. They poured savage fire from six-guns into the shack before they turned and raced their horses to the creek.

The shack sent out another blasting roll of sound. Two horses went down and one rider sprawled from the saddle and did not rise. The other scrambled under the cover of the creek bank.

Jason Jay's prize mount lay dead on the trampled sod of the yard, gleaming like new satin. One of Judson's men lay near it, and another, the one caught on the retreat, was motionless between the yard and creek. Bowen had seen Judson pick up one wounded man and carry him away.

Judson had chosen his men carefully. They wasted no time at the creek. They dismounted, took cover under the north bank and sent a murderous blast of rifle fire into the shack. They could not know, Bowen considered with grim satisfaction, that the floor of the house was dug three feet below ground. But Judson, standing up unhurriedly to survey the situation, must have caught some inkling of the truth from the powder bursts that came from the shack just at ground level. He crouched down, began to shout and point. Four men ran to their horses and started up the hill above the river.

"All right," Bowen said. He knocked the leader from the saddle with his second shot. Penrose Jay killed another's horse, and the man ran back to the creek.

The other two, in spite of a furious surge of fire from the house, made it up the hill, and soon were firing down upon the shack.

"No good," Bowen said. "Keep 'em busy."

He and Jay did, and soon the two across on the other hill had switched their fire to Jay and Bowen.

Between shots Bowen observed that the firing from the creek seemed to be getting wild. The tarp roof of the shack, propped up with lumber, was jerking from slugs. There was something that he and Ma Hangman had overlooked, and it might prove fatal. Already powdersmoke was drifting up along the edges of the canvas. If Judson's men succeeded in shooting it down upon the defenders under it, the Broken Bit renegades could make their rush while those inside were choked with powder fumes and struggling under the heavy folds. It would be like shooting pigs in a sack.

"I got to clear that tarp for them," Bowen said. He ran to Jay's horse.

For the first hundred feet down the hill he was wide open for the bullets that came when those at the creek lifted their fire. The horse staggered under the impact of lead as Bowen was freeing the rope, but momentum carried it on until the shack was between Bowen and the creek. He kicked free of the stirrups as the horse went down, fell and rolled, and came up running.

"Hangman!" he yelled. "I'm coming in close to clear that tarp!"

He heard a yell from inside, acknowledgment, he hoped, for the words were not clear above the sound of barking rifles. Judson's men knew where he was, although he had the house between them and him. Their fire came lower, ripping through the walls, filling the air with singing splinters of bright wood. Bowen felt a tug against his hair, the bite of lead creasing one leg. His hat flew off.

But he went in close and put his loop where the pleats of canvas showed the center pole of support. And then, because he knew his luck could not hold much longer in the hail of lead ripping through the walls, he flung himself flat on his back and began to gather in the rope. The canvas bent his way. He gave a jerk and saw the tarp come far enough

to drape itself partly down one outside wall.

Rank powdersmoke came up in a rush. They were coughing steadily inside, half-blinded, Bowen guessed.

He heard Maxwell Hangman roar, "They're rushing, Bowen!"

THERE WAS no chance to get inside, no time now to run back up the hill. Bowen clutched at his gun. It was gone, lost when he had leaped from the dying horse. The roar of six-guns and the shouts of Judson's crew rushing from the creek seemed to have killed all sounds in the house. And then there came the same solid volley that had first greeted the attackers. It came again a few moments later.

Bowen saw the legs of someone who had reached the wall, the boots and legs of a man backing around the corner. The man came into clear view. It was Judson, his gun ready, his face close to the wall as he moved along the boards, looking for a crack or knothole. He found an opening and put the barrel of his gun against it, smiling coldly.

Bowen had rolled then to his hands and knee. He sprang half erect and went lunging forward. He never had a chance. Judson heard him, or sensed the movement, and whirled with his gun in line.

And then he shuddered. The gun dropped barrel down, and Judson, his face dark with savage surprise, swung his head to look up the hill behind the house. In the noise and confusion that seemed now to be lessening, Bowen had not known where the shot came from, but Judson, dying from it, had known, for his last conscious movement was to look up the hill to where Penrose Jay was standing with a smoking rifle.

Judson fell face down.

"They're on the run!" Hangman yelled.

It was done. A few of Judson's men had reached the walls of the house, and

there had ended the dream of one man to control all of Hangman's Park. The attack had died, the survivors rushing back to the creek to mount their horses.

Jay came down from the hill and stared in wonder at the seven powder-grimed men who came from the shack, some of them still-coughing. He knew Maxwell Hangman, but neither Jay nor Bowen had ever seen the six strapping counterparts of him, men with townsmen's paleness, but with the clear marks of character that stamp strong men wherever they are.

"I just up and wired the boys," Ma Hangman said matter-of-factly. "Now this one here with the miserable little bullet nick on his head is Abraham, and this one. . . ."

Jay and Bowen unobtrusively tried to work the numbness out of their fingers afterwards. It was about then old Jason Jay and six of his crew rode up. The old man glanced at his prize white gelding and the other carnage in the yard, but he didn't speak until he had walked over to Maxwell Hangman.

"I been a damn fool, Hangman," he said. "Your cattle are on their way here now, and from now on when you need anything just come to Ladder." Old Jay looked at his nephew. "Or Broken Bit. I think Penrose may be able to get that Judy girl straightened out."

That, Bowen thought, was a job that Jay was welcome to, as far as Street Bowen was concerned.

"Bowen," old Hangman said, "I think you were just trying to get me out of the way, you and Ma, when you sent me to the land office. I will say that the governor wired right back and promised to do everything he could, but—"

"Hangman's Park can kill its own snakes," his wife said. She turned to her six offspring. "Two or three of you brats get over there and drag that sorrel horse off the place where I buried my teapot."

"Live by a gun—or die by a rope—" was the desperate choice the law gave him—a law older than hate, grimmer than range-born justice—from which the last appeal was—

A GRAVE AT GUNRISE



Zerfas spun around and pumped out two shots. . .

By **GEORGE C. APPELL**

TODD was sitting cross-legged in the entrance to his soddy when he saw what he'd feared for a month. Todd was cleaning his gun, and when he saw this man riding easily up from the Fort Keogh trail, he swabbed the barrel once, thumbed six cartridges into the cylinder, flipped it into the frame, shoved the gun halfway into his holster and sat for-

ward a bit. He forced himself to make a smoke and he forced himself to light it. He was blowing out the match when Morgan Bew rode up and nodded pleasantly and slid off and dragged reins over his horse's head.

Morgan Bew squatted opposite Todd and, after a moment, found makings and made a smoke and lighted it. He spouted

smoke straight out, so that it sifted into Todd's eyes.

Bew said, "Afternoon, Todd. Pleasant findin' you here, lookin' so healthy an' all." Bew was a big man with pasty skin and soft muscles and a slight paunch that rolled over his brass belt buckle. He was a man with uncertain eyes and gun-blue jaws and a way of not looking at you, but seeing all of you.

Todd didn't say anything. He stared past Morgan Bew to the rolling rangeland that he wanted to belong to, but that didn't want to belong to him. He lowered his eyes to the soddy he'd built near the old Fort trail, where they'd said he could shack awhile until something came up—or something moved him along. He didn't want to move. He was just getting his muscles back and the sun was beginning to cure his skin to a deep tan and the clean air of the Sky Valley Range was only now purifying his lungs.

Bew said, "Thought I'd find you here." He kept a bent elbow on each gun butt as he talked. "The Sky Valley brand, you used to say. Up by Underwood. Nice town, Underwood." He studied his plump hands.

"You go through it?"

"No—not yet." He raised his face and narrowed his eyes. "But we will."

"We?"

"We. You and me, and Zerfas, and a man named Myers."

Todd remembered Zerfas and Myers. Zerfas was small and dark and had short-cropped black hair. Myers was bland-featured and balding and genial, not the type you'd expect to find in a county jail. Todd said, "They out, those two?"

"Not yet. But soon." And Morgan Bew's laugh was not nice to hear. "We thought it would be nice to cut you in."

Todd dropped his cigarette. "In on what, Bew?"

Bew laughed again. "There's plenty of time to tell you. I'm holin' up here until

things're ready. They'll be along later.

Todd sensed the hardness of his gun butt against the hardness of his elbow. Better not. I'm fixin' to sign on the Sky Valley. I don't want trouble. No more of it, Bew. I had enough."

"There isn't that much." Bew looked all around him—at the trail, at the rangeland beyond the north fence, at the distant smudge of smoke that marked Underwood. Then he studied Todd's lean face. "You can't quit; you got a brand on you you'll never rub off. You rode for the county pen outfit too long to quit."

"I quit, Bew." Todd kept his voice down. "Ride on."

"You can't quit." Bew's arms moved imperceptibly. "Look, you got an extra blanket for an old cellmate, no, yes? And you got an extra can of beans for awhile? Sure." The guns came out, one high and one low. "That's how you'll get it, Todd. One in the brainbox and one in the guts. And there'll be three of us firin'. . . I'd consider the offer, if I was you." The guns sank into rag-limp holsters, and Bew was smiling. He spit out his cigarette and licked his lips. "You're an Underwood hand, you know the layout."

Todd wrestled with it, wanting to shove it off, trying to shove it off. But always the odds crowded his thoughts and hipped them off balance and left him uncertain. Morgan Bew was out, his term served; and soon now Zerfas and Myers would come riding up to the soddy and move in on the proposition. Three against one. At those odds, it doesn't make any difference who the one is.

And he couldn't move on. There was no place to go. Not with those three leaning against him. "I don't want it, Bew."

"You're gonna take it, Todd." The arms moved again. "I wouldn't advise any cute stuff, either. Anythin' happens to me—Zerfas an' Myers'll be along soon."

"Look it over yourself. Why do I have to come in? Tell me that."

Bew's smile collapsed and his voice was a nail on sandpaper. "Because we planned it this way, that's why. This is the twenty-eighth, and on the twenty-ninth the payroll for the Sky Valley goes into the bank. Only the Sky Valley isn't goin' to get it—we are. You're gonna show us the way in!"

And there it was, piling up against him, knocking him down again, when all he wanted to do was get up. There it came, all the way up the long miles from that cellblock where Todd had softened for three years. Where Bew had softened for seven. Zerfas for seven. The man Myers had been a short-termer. Six months. Six months for a gunfight in Twin Rivers, and now he wanted to chance it again and maybe go back. The second time for Myers wouldn't be six months, though. It would be closer to sixteen years. If he lived.

Todd said, "We got a sheriff in Underwood. Name of Ringler. Never missed a heart or a head shot in his life."

"Neither did I."

"He comes out here a lot."

"Why?"

Todd shrugged. "To see if I'm plan-nin' something. All I plan is to sign onto the Sky Valley."

"From jail to a rich brand like that? You got rocks in your head." Bew swung his jaws unbelievably. "Forty a month an' chuck. That's some proposition—even if you get it, which you probably won't. With us, now, you could split the hull payroll. One-fourth, say." He winked at Todd.

"I told you once, Ringler never misses."

"An' I told you, neither do I."

Todd got up. "You missed one night seven years ago."

"Seven years an' one month ago." Bew got up. He kept his hands near his holsters. "'Cause Zerfas was in the way." He winked again. "That was a sure job, that'n. Slice the wire an' shove the herd

an' throw it over the Line wetbacked."

"But Zerfas was in the way."

"You don't shoot your partner, Todd. Mind if I hobble awhile? I like it here. What time's supper? I could use a drink first." His third wink was obscene. "We old pals got to stick together, huh, Todd?"

TODD needed to smash a fist into that face and crush it. He needed to snag out his single gun and drill holes in that belly fat. But he couldn't; he wouldn't. He had to stay clean, on the level. He knew it as well as Ringler knew it, and Ringler wouldn't ask questions. Todd could see the whole horrible thing once more: the courtroom, the frocked prosecutor, the stony-faced jury. The cellblock, always the cellblock. The damp gray walls and the cocked guns of the guards and the slitted eyes of cellmates. Zerfas, spinning his thumbs around. . . . "When I get out, the world'd better watch out, 'cause I'm comin' out eager."

Myers, grinning sadly. "Reckon I could like this business of bein' on the demand-in' end of a gun. Better than peeling broncs." Myers, resting his eyes on Todd. "What you in for?"

"A man wouldn't pay me off, so I got drunk an' burned his barn."

"Why wouldn't he pay off?"

"Because he got drunk an' lost his money . . . he claimed. I hear he found it later, in a coffee can under his house."

Todd shook the image away from him, scattered the memory of the words.

Morgan Bew finished hobbling and went inside. Todd had a look at the man's saddle. A saddle can tell you a lot of things about a man and his ways; and his ways can point to his character. Bew's saddle was like his holsters—rag-limp, coming apart. A saddle like that is hard on a horse, and Todd inspected the horse. The animal had sores. Todd wondered where Bew had picked him up.

"A throwoff from a drive cavy." Bew

was standing directly behind him. "That's what you wanted to know, wasn't it, Todd?"

"Maybe. Come on in I'll set out beans." He broke open the airtights and started coffee and, at twilight, lighted the lamp. He didn't have any liquor, and he wouldn't have offered it if he had. There had been enough trouble already from liquor . . . even if the man had been lying about losing his money. Three years wasted in the cold steel bones of a county jail, watching the clouds float by, sniffing the prairie beyond. Hearing barred doors smash shut, hearing locks click. Waking and sleeping to the tread of guards' boots.

Todd shivered, and poured coffee.

Morgan Bew ate noisily, without looking up. Ate the way he used to in the prisoners' mess, elbows splayed wide, shoulders low, jaws chomping and sucking.

Suddenly Todd wasn't hungry. He went out and tended his horse and hauled water and came back to the soddy. He was fingering for makings when he heard the hoofs thumping up from the trail, and his hand went to his gun.

Bew slipped away from the plank table inside and crouched out of reach of the lamp shadows. There was no guilt on the man now. He had done his time; but seven years in a cellblock teaches a man new sets of reactions.

Todd took his hand off his gun. The silhouette approaching him wasn't Zervas'

short frame nor Myers' dumpy one. This silhouette was high and lean from hat crown to hips. It was the big redhead, Ringler himself.

He swung off and walked up to Todd. "See you bought some stock." His hatbrim dipped toward the two horses beyond the soddy.

"I got a caller, sheriff."

"Oh?" Ringler pretended immense surprise.

Todd said, "Hear from the Sky Valley yet? I know they want hands for round-up."

"And you want me to recommend you. I dunno, Todd. You only been out a short while."

"You aimin' to starve me?" He tried to laugh. "I haven't been paid in more'n three years."

"I know." The sheriff lanked up to the soddy and ducked inside and raised the lamp wick. "Hullo there."

Morgan Bew was against the wall with arms spread, fingers open, throwing it in the sheriff's face that he hadn't reached for a gun.

Ringler was pleasant enough. "Friend of Todd's, huh?"

"Man can have friends, can't he?" Bew's restless eyes were focused on the gray metal star on Ringler's vest. Bew was beginning to sweat.

"Why, sure. All he wants." Ringler knocked the coffee can with a knuckle.

SEEK POPULAR BUY POPULAR!

All of your fictional tastes will be satisfied with POPULAR'S glittering array of Western, Detective, Mystery, Love, Sports, Adventure, Fantasy Magazines

TAKE A TIP . . .

TAKE THE POPULAR TRAIL!



"Still warm. Mind if I drink, Todd?"

"Go ahead."

Ringler sipped coffee. "You look pale, mister. Been off the range?" He wiped his mouth. "Hospital, maybe?"

"Maybe." Bew's eyes flickered from Ringler to Todd, from Todd to Ringler. He lowered his arms to his sides and stood away from the wall. He wasn't sweating so much. "Man's movements are his own business, I was allus taught."

Ringler agreed with a nod, and put down the cup. "Up to a certain point." He let that hang in the silence.

Todd took a breath. "My friend, here, is ridin' on in the morning."

"Is he?" Again the great surprise.

Go on, Ringler, play with us awhile. Play games if you want to. I got nothing to do. Not till later.

"Y'know, Todd, I should think your friend would want to ride in the morning. I mean—" he glanced at Bew—"you bein' low on rations and cash, and all." He moved to the door, paused and went out. From the darkness they heard him call, "Thanks for the coffee."

Neither of them said a word until the sound of the sheriff's hoofs had vanished on the rail. Then Bew came to the plank and leaned on it.

"Like I said, Todd—Zerfas an' Myers'll be here soon. If you plan any silky business. . . .

"The odds are against it. Relax."

Bew relaxed his body, but his mind was spinning fast. He directed it south, out to the empty spaces beyond the Sky Valley fence, where even now Zerfas and Myers would be jogging easily north toward Underwood and the soddy just off the Fort Keough trail. Maybe tonight, they'd be here.

TODD had spoken of Underwood a lot, down there in the cell. A one-street town, but a nice one. The Sky Valley crowd supported it, and it

didn't want any more than that. A one-street town with false fronts and real people. So many times in the long, long night had Todd conjured up the picture of Underwood, with its shade trees and white porches and the precise, rectangular intercrossing of cement lines on brick where the bank was. Underwood was proud of that bank. First bank in the state to have a brick front. Match that if you can, mister.

Bew leaned away from the plank and lowered the lamp wick. "I don't like bright light any more. Funny, ain't it?"

"Is it?" Todd made a smoke and exhaled into the lamp light.

Bew sat down, pulled up one gun, snapped out the cylinder and plungered six cartridges onto the table. He started to roll them around, to play with them. "Funny, these come from hell. In seven years of hell, Todd, I collected six bullets. One filched from that guard with the gimp leg, another swiped when the turnkey was bendin' over to spit Wonder if a bullet from hell hurts worse'n any other?"

"I wouldn't know, Bew."

Bew faced up, eyes brittle. "Maybe you'll find out. Get that direct. Zerfas is faster'n you—or me—or even that red sheriff that come in here. Zerfas, he'll do what I say."

"Will he?" And Todd received a thought. "Say to him to stay away from here, then. Say to him that four men where one usually is can attract attention. Say to him to hole up beyond here some place—and tell yourself to go with him."

"Me?" Bew pushed the cartridges back into the cylinder and swung the cylinder back into the frame. He holstered. "But the sheriff's already seen me. Mebbe, though, it might be better if Zerfas an' Myers pitched a mile away." A new expression came into his eyes. "Mebbe you're in this at that, thinkin' so smart."

"Could be."

"You got nothin' to lose, have you?"

Todd finished his smoke. He didn't say anything.

Bew crossed his elbows on the table. "Here's how I figure it: you go down tomorrow—local man, see?—and fake up a talk in the bank. See everything. Engrave it on yourself. Then come back an' make sketches. Meyers to watch, Zerfas to blow the safe. Me to collect an' carry, you to take us out the best way. We hit, say, at about three in the mornin'." He trailed his fingertips over his teeth. "Good?"

"Sure."

"Damn right it's good. An' Todd?"

"Bew?"

"I wouldn't forget what I told you twice: try a stunt, an' you got six bullets all through you."

"I won't forget."

Bew yawned abruptly. "Me, I'm tired." He searched for a blanket. "Ridin' doesn't come easy to me these days. They'll be here tonight, I guess." He said it warningly.

They came with the first pearl flush of dawn, after the manner of men who from habit ride the night miles. They came quietly, and pinned their horses, and made throat noises to wake up the soddy.

Todd hadn't slept at all; he shook the snoring Bew and stepped outside. "Zerfas?"

The short man was unshaven and his eyes were hound-dog pink and his underlip was out. "This is the best you got?"

"I haven't been workin' lately. Hello, Myers."

Myers grinned flatly. "Hullo, Todd." They shook hands. Zerfas pushed past them and hauled the sitting Bew out of his blankets. "How does it look?"

Bew stood up. "Good. Todd's in."

"He better be in." Zerfas did some footwork, faking shots here and there. "I'm out've practice just now, but—" he eyed Todd—"I can get back very soon."

Todd started the coffee.

"Water bucket's in back, if you want to wash."

"Tryin' to get rid of yore old friends already?" Zerfas dropped his guns into leather and rubbed his grimy hands. "Took them guns off a poor old party who seemd to be sleepin' too deeply in a line camp. Huh, Myers?"

"That's right." Myers smiled sleepily.

Todd wondered why Myers had come in. It'd take a man like Myers ten years to get over six months in prison. Todd said, "Bew and me have been talkin'. You two better pitch away from here—Sheriff's around."

"What sheriff? Ringler?" Zerfas' upper lip rose. "I heard of him. He's all bluff."

"He shoots."

Zerfas tore into some bread. "He sleeps, too. By Mighty, it's good to be out of that steel crate yonder . . . Pitch away from here?" He swallowed. "We'll think about it."

They washed up; they had breakfast. Todd cleaned up. He told Zerfas, "There's a big gully about a mile north off the trail where it crosses South Fork. You could pitch in there." He went out and took his horse. He nodded from the saddle. "I'll go see my banker."

They all laughed. It was a good joke.

Underwood had been awake for an hour by the time Todd trotted in and tied. He nodded to several people, and some of them nodded back. No words, though. Still no words. He'd burned a man's barn. It didn't make any difference why. That's what the jury had said, and it didn't make any difference that the man had long since pulled stakes for elsewhere. The man had recovered his planted money long after the jury had said that Todd burned the barn without reason. So it hadn't made any difference.

Limas Trout watched Todd amble slowly the short length of the bank. He

thought, *Todd's surely shook off his jail look*—but I wonder how he thinks these days?

"Mornin', Todd." *This'll be for a loan, and he won't get it.*

"Mornin', Mister Trout."

"Sit down. Friend of yours was in here a while ago."

Todd sat down. "Do I have any?"

"Ringler."

"You mean, Ringler was in here awhile ago. Don't confuse him with any friend of mine."

Limas Trout smiled into a hand. As a banker he had taken many risks in his time, and he had come to learn that sometimes conversational risks are the most dangerous sort. Especially among cowpokes who temper up when they think their rights are being invaded. He didn't pursue the subject of Ringler. "What can we do for you, Todd?"

"Well, I thought . . . livin' in a soddy isn't much, and it may be—" he glanced around the small bank curiously—"awhile before I can sign onto a brand." He brought his eyes back to Limas Trout. "The Sky Valley, for example."

Trout laced fingers together and pouched his lips. "You want a loan, Todd?"

"Well . . ." Todd saw something that made him jump inside. He saw Morgan Bew coming into town at a walk, and he saw Ringler come out of the Gentlemen's Emporium across the street and stop at the plankwalking and stare.

"Todd? A loan, I said. You want a loan?" Trout sounded weary.

Todd swung forward. "No, not a loan. Not a bank loan." Two women came in with a small boy between them; they spoke to the teller. The teller was polite to them. One of the women was Mrs. Jamison, wife of the foreman at Sky Valley. "But I thought maybe a personal loan might be arranged." There were no bars in front of the teller's cage, only a low glass partition with a slot in the bot-

tom. The safe was a wall safe, and it was behind Limas Trout's desk. "For a short time only."

Trout unlaced his fingers and sighed. "Sorry, Todd. Wish we could help you."

"Not even a personal loan?" There were two windows on each side of the room, and the distance from the lower sills to the floor was about four feet.

Trout had appeared to lose interest. "Sorry, Todd. With no collateral, no wages coming in. . . . Sorry."

TODD got up and put on his hat and turned away without speaking again to Limas Trout. He followed Mrs. Jamison and the other woman and the boy out of the bank. *The front door is a double door with brass hinges, and both doors open inward; it is about twenty feet from the doors to the tie-rail. The best way to leave town is north toward Keogh, then east for the railhead . . . "Mornin', Sheriff."*

Ringler nodded pleasantly. "Todd, I been talkin' to your house guest. Reckon he's leavin' town now."

Morgan Bew was still mounted. "Nice town, like you said, Todd." He faced away from the sheriff. "Quiet, though. Some quiet." Bew winked at Todd and circled on the forehand and headed back north, back the way he had come. It occurred to Todd that Bew was figuring out a route of escape, just in case Todd didn't.

"Todd?" Ringler stepped closer. "You known that man long? He looks like he's down an' out. See his saddlery, Todd?" Ringler shook his head unbelievably. "Worn plumb through. Full of slits and frays."

"You seem to take great interest in strangers." Todd mounted.

The sheriff considered that. "Thing is, Todd, that today a whole lot of payroll money is due in the bank from railhead. So I like to know what's goin' on. Ridin'

home? I'll ride with you a short spell."

Todd had fear then; fear that comes from suspicion, fear that was stalking him in circles, ever closer—like a grey beast stalking the fringes of the mind.

It was not a pleasant ride for Todd. He hoped that Myers and Zervas had left. Maybe Bew was meeting them in the gully up north a mile, and then the soddy would look clean to the sheriff. Todd didn't want any trouble with the sheriff.

Ringler said, "You can tell a lot about a man from his saddlery. And you know something, Todd?"

Go on, Ringler, push me, lean against me. "What?"

"This: saddlery is just like handwriting, isn't it? Saddlery can tell a man a lot—if he wants it to." The sheriff coughed. "I always inspect saddlery." Morgan Bew rode at them from northward, returning to town.

Pacing it off, he is! Figuring each inch. He won't go back to jail—not if planning can prevent it.

Ringler smiled. "Thought you were pullin' out, mister."

"Maybe I am—now." Bew rode on south into town.

Ringler offered the makings, but Todd refused them. The sheriff observed, "Yes, saddlery can tell a man most anything he wants to know . . . here's your turnoff, Todd. An honest man, that is."

Todd started for the second time that morning. Between the turnoff and the soddy were two riders, and they were Myers and Zervas. Ringler was looking strangely at Myers, and Myers was trying to look away.

Ringler said, "I'll leave you here, Todd. Mornin'—and take care of your leather goods."

Myers and Zervas put down to him at a walk, and reined in.

Zervas hooked a thumb. "That your sheriff? Hell—he's too big a target for

to be a lawman." And the short man snagged out a gun and spun it and caught it and faked a shot at Ringler's back.

"I'm improvin' eh, Todd?" Zervas holstered. "Myers and me, we're goin' on to that gully now. Bew's measuring things off in his own way—in case your judgment fails."

Todd turned his horse out and sat in the soddy with his jaws in his palms, trying to figure it. It was rising like a hundred gray beasts now, mocking him, locking him in. You lose your temper because you have rights, and they take those rights away from you and send you to jail. You do your stretch, no complaints, no crying. Then you get out, and all you want is to go straight and level and breathe clean air and work with right people. And what happens? It comes out of prison right up behind you, right into your soul—and it sticks a knife in there. You're stuck. You can't get away. It'll never let you alone.

Ringler smelled trouble on Todd; Ringler must have figured Bew for what he was. There were no hospitals this side of Yankton. And he'd seen Myers. He had recognized Myers, and Myers had the look of prisons on him. Myers, Zervas, Bew. Versus Todd. Six shots tearing through him, ripping into his guts and lungs and brains. Whirling him off his feet and puncturing the life essence from him and leaving him dead in the dust. And everyone in Underwood would know that Todd had always been crooked.

Morgan Bew rode up and dismounted and put a smoke together. He stood in the doorway of the soddy. "You say you ain't got a drink?" He gushed smoke. It slid across the sunshafts. "Payroll's in from railhead. I seen it. I need a drink. Before tonight, Todd."

So did Todd. "Sorry"—imitating Limas Trout—"there isn't one."

"County jailers are short of givin' cash to released prisoners," Bew said

"I'd buy one—if I could." Smoke shot across sunlight again. "Tomorrow, I'll be able to buy a case, if I want it—Right now, I'm measurin' trail once more, then sleepin' awhile."

It came to Todd that a last chance for his own life was perched on his shoulders, tickling his chin, nudging his ribs. "You pacin' from town?"

"Once more. In case you . . ." He let it fade like that, and his arms moved against his guns.

"Why, I got a little money. There's a saloon next to the Gentlemen's Emporium."

"I seen it."

"If you wait a minute." Todd got up and went behind the burlap curtain that shut off his end of the soddy, where his cot was. He found a leather bag and opened it and made fine jingling noises with the coins inside. He also found a pencil stub and some mouldy paper, and when he came out again he handed some coins to Morgan Bew. "Pay me back after we split, tomorrow. You'll have plenty of loot then."

"Thanks." And Bew had genuine surprise, not the faked kind that Ringler seemed to like. He stooped to count them, and Todd went out and stroked Bew's horse—neck, withers, haunches. Especially haunches.

Bew came out. "I'll be back—sober enough. We meet Myers and Zerfas at one in the morning—here." Bew turned in the saddle. "And don't try to do any mile-measurin' yourself. You'll be watched."

"Enjoy your drink, Bew."

Todd needed one more than ever. He wished that he had asked Bew to bring some back to the soddy, and then he was glad that he had not. Tonight, his hands would have to be steady.

He ate cold lunch listlessly. He cleaned his gun, he rubbed down his horse. He tried to fall asleep, but sleep wouldn't come.

HE DIDN'T want to go back to that prison, not again. And the next time would be twenty years. It would kill him—if Ringler didn't kill him first. He could see it happening, could see the jury, the frocked prosecutor. Could see Limas Trout. "Yes, he came into the bank the morning before the attempt. He was looking all around. He was faking, about wanting a personal loan. I don't give personal loans, he knows that. . . ." Before the attempt.

Morgan Bew came back only slightly drunk. He tumbled into a blanket and was snoring immediately. Todd let him snore for quite a while before he stepped out and inspected the saddlery. When that was done, he felt better. He almost enjoyed his supper, cold as it was. Beans aren't bad eaten cold. It depends on who you eat them with. Todd ate his alone that evening.

They met Myers and Zerfas at the turnoff. They didn't speak, but lined south for Underwood in silence, after the manner of men who from habit ride at night. Todd led them, covered from behind by Morgan Bew. Then Zerfas, then Myers.

They took their time, under the stars. At the northern edge of Underwood they dismounted, and while Todd and Bew went down the night-shadows on one side of the darkened street, Zerfas and Myers held to the shade trees on the other.

Myers took post in front of the tie rail, twenty feet from the bank's front double doors. They were barred doors, but Bew muttered a pleasantry about bars and his knowledge of them. He and Zerfas had the hasps off inside of five minutes, and began easing the doors apart.

Todd's heart was kettle-drumming his ribs and his tongue was the size of a boot and he couldn't hear very well. He didn't dare look left or right, up street or down. He tried to swallow, but his throat stuck.

Then they were inside the bank, prowling toward the wall safe at the back, bending low to stay under the window sills. And a horrid thought came to Todd and he cursed to himself, though he was not a cursing man. It came to him that Ringler wanted it this way, wanted all four, and not just three. Wanted to send Todd back to that cellblock and get rid of him forever. No questions from Ringler, ever. And a man who wouldn't question wouldn't compromise, wouldn't deal. Todd should have known that. Yet Bew's saddle. . . . But Ringler could double-cross. The law always can. The law can do anything to a man, once it has him the first time. *The law doesn't want the first time to be the last, does it, Todd?*

The wall safe drew foul words from Zerfas, because it came so easy. It whined open on semi-circular hinges and hung invitingly. "I expected a little tussle," Zerfas murmured.

Bew shielded a match flame with his bulk and started to reach inside for the sacks and a shot exploded and Bew jerked to its impact and struck against the opened safe and folded forward.

Zerfas leapt around with both guns bare and saw a target coming at him. It was Myers, and Myers was firing.

Zerfas yelped and squeezed off two shots before the oncoming Myers smashed a slug through that yelping mouth and tore part of the lower jaw off. Zerfas sat down hard, sat down suddenly.

Todd just stood there, hands empty, staring. Lamps bloomed, and Ringler's voice was loud from a window. Then the sheriff snaked his way over the sill and dropped lightly to the floor and assisted

Limas Trout after him. Trout had a lamp, and Myers took it while the sheriff got another one going.

Ringler knelt, lamp high. "Nice shooting, Myers."

"Todd here, 'was almost in the way."

Limas Trout was peering at Todd. "How much do you want?" he was asking. "You ought to have wages."

Todd built a smoke with trembling hands and lighted it at Limas Trout's out-held lamp chimney. He kept shaking his head. "I don't follow. I'm just a cowpoke likes his rights. I—"

Ringler seemed to see him for the first time. He got up and smiled pleasantly enough, and nodded. "Yes—I'm recommendin' to Sky Valley that you get signed on. I got your note. It was in that cantle where you shoved it. He—" the sheriff pointed at Bew—"was in drinkin'. So early in the afternoon, too. So I inspected saddlery, and by Mighty, it told me somethin' about a man."

Limas Trout closed the safe. "Somebody'll have to stay here tonight, 'til I can get that tumbler-set fixed."

"I will," Myers offered.

Ringler said, "Had to send ol' Myers to the county pen for six months of hell to find out what the boys'd do with all those bullets they were stealin'. Todd, meet Myers, though I imagine you've met before. I couldn't have him too close to Bew, and Zerfas was watchin' him. That left it up to you for exact time and date, Todd. Myers is the laziest deputy at Fort Keogh. Myers— Todd'll work with you until the roundup starts and he can draw some decent pay. Limas! Shower down some cash for an honest man!"

IN THE NEXT ISSUE—

GUNWAY TOWN

By GEORGE C. APPELL

OCTOBER 15 *WESTERN TALES*—ON SALE SEPTEMBER 8th!

Even Jim Colliver knew he had been born to hang—but not till he'd ridden to the end of his rope did his thundering guns say why!

KILL-PROUD

By THOMAS THOMPSON



He recognized Perry Grant
and the marshal. . . .

IT HAD BEEN raining for forty-eight hours. To Jim Colliver, it seemed longer. He had ridden in it, slept in it—if you could call it sleeping—eaten in it—if two stale biscuits was eating—frozen in it and just plain soaked in it. He had asked for a job at six different spreads and he had been turned down six times. The last time was just over an

hour ago. The girl hadn't only turned him down, she had backed away from him as if she expected him to murder her where she stood. She had been expecting the sheriff, she said, and she thought that's who Jim was when she first heard him. He figured that was a hint intended to send him packing. *I should have told her about my great, shining honesty, he*

thought bitterly. *I should have told her that I'm the fair-haired boy—the only Colliver that has never been inside a jail, except to visit my folks.* He laughed at the joke that was wearing mighty thin.

He pulled his soggy coat closer around him and tipped his head so that the water ran from his wide-brimmed hat. He was a lean kid, gaunt, with much of the stringiness of youth still about him. His eyes were dark and brooding with too much thinking for his years, and the twist of his mouth was cynical. His saddle was old, his horse tired, and he had the complete dejection of a man who is broke. But the melancholy that was in him went deeper than that, for he had recently come from a hanging. It was the third one in his family. It had made him sick, and if he had been two years younger, he would have cried.

He rode out of the timber and into the town and he reined his horse into the single muddy street. The sign said, WELCOME TO MAYVILLE. It was a long time from May and the town didn't look as if it had strength enough to welcome anybody. Jim Colliver didn't particularly give a damn. He had about come to the end of his rope. He'd ask for a job once more, and if he didn't get it—well, maybe he'd make a job. The Collivers had always been able to do that.

He pushed back his coat and touched the cedar-butt .44 that had belonged to his late uncle. That was about all Uncle Hambone had to leave when they strung him up back there.

His horse nickered, and another at a hitchrail answered. There was a saloon halfway down the block, and there was a restaurant directly across the street. Jim had learned that neither restaurants nor saloons were in business for their health. He squinted his eyes and spit across the center of his lips. He rode slowly, and the horse's hoofs sucked at the gumbo mud and little wisps of steam curled from the

animal's hide and spurted from its nostrils like the exhaust from a laboring engine. The kid surveyed the town with his brooding eyes.

The bank was near the edge of town. It sat out by itself. It wasn't over two hundred yards from the back door of the bank to the edge of the woods. His uncle, Hambone Colliver, Jim supposed, would have made something of that. He dismounted and carefully tied his horse at the hitchrail. Water oozed through the seams of Jim's boots. He crossed the board walk, pushed open the doors of the saloon and went inside. The warmth, the smell of humanity and the tang of whiskey and tobacco smoke were good in his nostrils. Money was a hell of a nice thing to have.

He walked up to the bar and was surprised when he caught sight of himself in the mirror. No wonder that girl out at the last ranch had ordered him to keep riding. He wasn't very pretty with that six day growth of downy beard and a longer growth of whipped disgust that was showing in his eyes. So she was expecting the sheriff, was she? He glanced at himself again and drew down one corner of his mouth. He looked a little older than his seventeen years that way. *And it will be a mistake to keep on telling my real name, just like I'm not ashamed of it,* he thought. *From now on I'll be Bill Smith. These honest folks like to have you lie to them.*

The bartender said, "What was that?"

"I said I'm looking for a job. Any kind of a job."

A tall, heavy-set man with a match in the corner of his mouth and a star on his vest sidled up alongside Jim. "I know where you can get some free meals," the lawman said, and he winked at the bartender.

Jim turned slowly and surveyed the lawman. He was town marshal, according to his badge. He had a well fed look about

him and it angered Jim to see it. He had a way of looking all around the room, making sure everyone was listening before saying anything. He looked around that way now. "There's a free bed goes with the board, too."

"Hell, Colly," the bartender said, "lay off. I'll give the kid a handout."

For just a second Jim Colliver wasn't a kid. He was a man, and a mad one. "I didn't ask for a handout," he said. "I asked for a job."

He turned and started to leave and the marshal gripped his elbow and held him. "Don't get smart, kid," the marshal said.

"Look," Jim said, and then he ran out of words. The marshal stood there, leering at him. A big man, big with authority. A tough man who knew how to handle little people and was proud of it. He reached out suddenly and gave Jim a shove.

"Keep riding, mister." He glanced around, and a dozen men were watching him. He looked at the bartender and the bartender lowered his eyes and started scrubbing the bar. The bar didn't need scrubbing.

Jim started walking toward the door. He heard the bartender say, "Damn it, Colly—"

The marshal had the match back in his mouth. Jim could tell by the sound of his voice. "Damn no-good kid," the marshal said. "The country's gettin' full of 'em. They wouldn't work if you gave 'em a job. Ride around with a gun on their hip, actin' tough. By the Mighty, when I was a kid I worked for my beans and I kept workin' until I got someplace."

Jim pushed through the double doors. The cold, wet rain blew across the porch and was twice as cold after the warmth inside.

HE UNTIED his horse and rode slowly, squinting out from under his drooping hatbrim. Something kept building up inside him until it was

ready to choke him. He was feeling sorry for himself and it didn't bother him in the least to admit it. He had been born on the wrong side of the gully, that was all, and it was high time he realized there was no crossing over. He had let his reins go slack and his horse stopped of its own accord, directly in front of the bank.

A minute before, there had been a half dozen people on the street. A sudden gust of rain had driven them inside and now he was sitting there dripping and soaked, completely alone. The windows of the bank were steamed up, so that people inside wouldn't be looking out. There was an arc-shaped sign on the window of the bank proclaiming it the Bank of Mayville. Bankers never did have much imagination in names. He thought of some pot-bellied, pink-cheeked man sitting in there, surrounded by all that money. A straight line of block letters under the bow of the firm name said the bank had assets of \$100,000.00. That was a hell of a thing, one man having that much money while ranchers went broke and people were hungry.

There was a little lean-to shed in back of the bank. It had a manger full of hay across one side and a good looking bay was there, saddled and ready.

"At least *you* can eat, boy," he said.

He reined his own horse into the shed. He dismounted, slipped the bit out of the horse's mouth, and then he stood there, staring at the rain, and after a while he opened his soggy coat and pushed it back and his hand was resting on the butt of that gun.

He went in through the front door and went straight to the square pine table that set alone in the middle of the floor. There was an inkwell there and a pen. He took a piece of paper and scrawled busily on it while he looked around. *Serve them right if I did rob the damn thing*, he told himself. He wouldn't, but it would serve them right if he did.

There was only one other customer in the bank beside himself. The customer was fat and short, well dressed, and he wore a huge diamond ring on the little finger of his left hand. There was a heavy gold watch chain across the front of the well dressed man's vest. He was tilted back in a chair at the desk of the man who was probably owner of the bank. The bank owner was middle-aged. He had gray hair and a patient face and worried eyes. He wasn't pot-bellied. The well dressed man had a cigar in his mouth. He didn't take it out when he talked. It bobbed up and down and Jim could hear every word he said.

He said, "I'm willing to pull you out of it, Larch."

The man called Larch wiped the palm of his hand across his forehead. "I knew you would be, Perry. You can go to hell."

The well dressed man's eyes widened. He dropped his chair as if he were very surprised. He was a hell of a poor actor, Jim Colliver decided. "Larch, do you know what this means?"

There was a brass name plate on the banker's desk. He kept fiddling with it and now he turned it around and Jim Colliver could see the name. Larch Benton. "You've waited a long time, haven't you, Perry?" Larch Benton said. "Perry Grant, the great do-gooder."

"I don't like that, Larch," Perry Grant said. His voice had changed. "I was offering to help you, but if you want to get your back up, I can cause you trouble."

"So now you're making threats?"

"A bank run is an ugly thing," Perry Grant said. "It will get tiresome trying to explain to people why you wouldn't sell negotiable assets when you had a chance."

"If I couldn't sleep for the rest of my life," Larch Benton said, "that would get tiresome too. I like sleeping."

"I'm warning you, Larch."

"Go ahead," Larch Benton said.

"Spread the word. Tell them the bank is busted. Tell them Larch Benton can't even cash a hundred dollar check. But you better have one of your gun-handly friends in the mob, because as long as I'm alive you won't get what you want."

"Now who's the do-gooder?"

"There's a difference," Larch Benton said, "but you wouldn't know about it."

Perry Grant got out of his chair and he wasn't smiling. He stepped out through the wicket and looked straight at Jim Colliver and didn't even see him. He turned around suddenly then and said "Larch, you're being a fool. It just happens I've got some extra cash on hand that's all."

"I know," Larch Benton said quietly "Get out."

Perry Grant hitched his shoulders into his well-made coat. He hooked the little finger of his left hand under his heavy watchchain and the diamond ring flashed. He started to say something and changed his mind. He bit down on the cigar and it tilted sharply, and he walked straight through the bank and out the front door.

Larch Benton leaned forward and put his face in his hands. He sat there, very quiet, very tired. There were some legal looking papers on the desk in front of him. He picked them up and put them in a large brown envelope, and he put the envelope in his inside coat pocket. For a long time he sat there, staring at the clean top of his desk, and when he looked up finally he was looking into the bore of Jim Colliver's six-shooter. He looked at the gun and he looked at the kid and the tiredness went out of his eyes and there was amusement there. He said, "Is there something I can do for you, sonny?"

The banker was a man taking time to play games with a little boy. The calm question threw Jim off balance. He knew his voice was going to squeak, as it sometimes did, but he couldn't help it. "Hand

over your cash. And be quick about it."

"You'll have to get in line," the banker said. "There's dozens ahead of you."

"You're gonna get in trouble, mister."

The banker grinned, and it was the grin of a man who just didn't give a hang for much of anything. He said, "Sonny, if you can show me a new kind of trouble, I'd be glad to see it. In about two minutes that front door is going to burst open and there'll be seventy-five or a hundred people come charging in here, all of them after my scalp. When it comes to getting shot by a stranger or by somebody I might know, I can't see that there's much choice. So go ahead, laddy buck. Start causing me trouble." He got up, pushed by Jim, walked across the bank and locked the front door. He turned then and dusted his hands.

Jim's knees were shaking. The gun felt heavy and he didn't try to hold it up. "Sonny," Larch Benton said, "if you want this bank you can have it. The whole damn shebang. I'm getting out of here, and if you even look like you're going to try to stop me I'll take that damn hogleg away from you and stuff it down your scrawny throat." He came back to his desk, took his hat from the golden oak costumer, creased it carefully and set it on his head. After that he opened a drawer and took out a six-shooter which he stuffed into the waistband of his pants. Giving Jim a quick glance he said, "With conditions the way they are, it seems to me you could find something to do that would be a damn sight more profitable than robbing banks." He started walking toward the back door.

JIM STOOD there and let him go. The front door began to rattle. Jim recognized the voice of Perry Grant. "Open up, Larch. We want to talk to you" The door rattled again, more vigorously than before, and there was a growing rumble of voices.

Jim Colliver was scared. He turned and

ran through the back door, following Larch Benton. Benton was just mounting the bay that was tied there. Jim fumbled with the bridle of his own dun and his hands were trembling. He piled into the saddle and jerked the animal around, and for just a second he saw Larch Benton's eyes.

Benton said, "What's the matter, sonny? No guts?"

Behind them they heard the front door of the bank burst inward.

Jim followed Larch Benton for two reasons. In the first place, that was the way his horse wanted to go; in the second place, Jim himself didn't know a better way to go. They came around the corner of the bank and there in the street the bank run mob was yelling and cursing. Glass kept shattering.

They could hear Perry Grant's voice above the others. "Wait a minute, boys. Let's don't lose our heads along with losing our money!" Jim thought he saw the marshal. He couldn't be sure.

One voice lifted above the others. "There he goes! He's got five hundred dollars of my money!" A gun cracked, and Jim saw Larch Benton bend forward in his saddle. He couldn't tell if the banker had been hit or not, but he felt a panic such as he had never felt before. Benton turned his horse around a building and they were into the main street, pounding straight for the timber. Jim followed.

They held their speed until they came to the same dim wagon road Jim had traveled a few hours before. The banker reined to the left there and they followed the road for approximately a half mile, and then Benton turned abruptly into a cedar thicket. He pulled his horse up sharply, but he didn't straighten in his saddle. He sat there a few seconds, breathing heavily, his hands gripping the saddlehorn, and now Jim could see the blood spreading down the back of Benton's coat.

He saw Benton sway, and he spurred

forward to catch him. He made a grab for him on the run, like a pickup man catching a bronc peeler at a rodeo. He missed and Larch Benton slid out of the saddle and hit the ground hard. Benton's horse shied. Jim made a grab for the bridle and saw that the reins were looped around the horn. The horse bolted and ran like a scared deer.

Jim spurred after the runaway, but he hadn't gone a hundred and fifty feet when he realized that it was a hopeless move. He slid his horse to a stop, dismounted and ran back to where Larch Benton was pulling himself into a sitting position. Benton kept leaning way forward, as if his stomach hurt, but the bullet wound was high in his shoulder. Benton was hurt and he was scared and it was all there in his face. He was a human being in bad trouble, and it drew Jim close to him quicker than anything else could have. He dropped to his knees alongside the wounded man and started removing the banker's coat.

Jim took out his pocket knife and carefully cut the shirt away from the wound. Just looking at the shirt it seemed as if the wound must be as large as his head, but when he cut the fabric away he was surprised to find how small it actually was. He ripped the back out of the banker's shirt, squeezed the blood out of the fabric, and now the blood was all over his hands.

He wadded the shirt into a crude pad and placed the pad over the wound and started looking for some way to bind the compress in place. He went to his saddle and cut off two long strings and tied them together with a square knot. Putting the knot exactly over the wound he passed the strings around Benton's chest and tied them in front, pulling them as tight as he could get them. He tried to tie the strings and the knot kept slipping. "Put your finger on the knot," he told Larch Benton. Benton did as he was told and Jim completed the tie.

He got his arms around the banker and helped him to stand. For a little while they stood that way, close together, Benton's weight leaning on him, silently begging for support. Suddenly Benton's knees went slack and he sank to the ground and Jim couldn't hold him up. He got down on his knees again and started slapping Benton's face. "Come to, damn it! Please come to. Listen to me. You gotta talk to me. Where can I take you? Listen, will you please talk to me?" The next thing he knew he was crying like a baby and Larch Benton was looking at him, his eyes steady and bright.

"If you can get me on that horse, kid, I can show you a place where we can get help."

The next few minutes were a nightmare that seemed like hours. He was struggling with Benton, trying not to hurt him, try-

AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

SENSATIONAL NEW **TING**
CREAM FOR

FOOT ITCH

- REGULAR USE HELPS
RELIEVE ITCHING - SOOTHES
BURNING BETWEEN CRACKED

PEELING TOES -
AIDS HEALING
AMAZINGLY!



DURING
WAR USED
IN HOSPITALS
NOW

RELEASED TO
DRUGGISTS

**GUARANTEED
TING MUST**

SATISFY YOU IN
A WEEK - OR
MONEY BACK!



IN LAB TESTS,

TING CREAM

PROVED EFFECTIVE

IN KILLING SPECIFIC

TYPES OF

ATHLETE'S FOOT

FUNGUS ON

60 SECOND

CONTACT!

EVEN IF OTHER PRODUCTS
HAVE FAILED TRY AMAZING
TING CREAM TODAY!

GREASELESS, STAINLESS

ALL DRUGGISTS ONLY 60¢ A TUBE

Ting

ing to lift him up. And Benton was grasping for the saddlehorn, trying to pull himself up. The horse shied and it seemed to Jim Colliver as if he were reliving his entire life in those few minutes, struggling against something that was too heavy for him, trying to lift something—himself, maybe—into a place that was too high to reach. He wanted to give up—tell Benton to go to hell. It would be so easy to drop him and leave him there on the ground. Then suddenly Larch Benton was lying across the saddle and it seemed as if no one thing had put him there, but an accumulation of many things.

They were headed up a narrow sled road then, steep, leading deep into the timber.

They came to a small meadow and Larch Benton's horse was there. The reins were trailing and the horse kept tripping on them. Jim took the bay. After that they made better time.

From time to time Jim glanced at Benton, and he realized that Benton didn't fit the picture he had always had of bankers. There was fight in Larch Benton.

Benton wasn't a young man. Fifty-five, maybe sixty, Jim figured, and at seventeen, sixty could look pretty old. But Benton didn't act like an old man. He had lost a lot of blood and he was in pain, but he kept hanging on. And for the first time Jim began to wonder about what had actually happened back there in town.

Benton's chin was against his chest. He looked up now, moving his head with a rolling motion, and Jim could barely hear him. "Cut right, up there at the head of the canyon. We'll come in the back way. I told the sheriff—" He couldn't make the last words. He went slack, all at once, and he just slid out of the saddle and landed in a crumpled heap. And before Jim could dismount he heard the horses coming up the trail behind them.

HE RAN back to where Benton was lying and one look told him the banker wasn't going to get up this time. The man was alive, but that was all. His face was white, his lips blue, and the only sign of life was the pulsing of the blood from the wound. Down the trail a ways Jim heard men calling back and forth. A voice he recognized as Colley's, the marshal's, said, "Fan out, boys. I know damn well he was hit!" Jim Colliver took one look at the wounded man and put his foot in the stirrup.

But he couldn't lift himself into the saddle. The dun kept shying, waiting for Jim to make up his mind, sensing the turmoil that was in the kid, and then Jim was back by the wounded man, tugging until the breath was torturing his lungs. There was a clattering of rocks a few yards above the trail. He'd take Benton there and then make a run for it. He started pulling Benton toward the rocks and he had him concealed when the riders came into view.

He recognized Perry Grant and the marshal; the other two were strangers to him. And for that matter, Larch Benton was a stranger. And yet he wasn't and Jim couldn't tell why. His hands were trembling when he drew Hambone Colliver's old six-shooter and flattened himself against the rocks. He heard the marshal say, "There's the horses. We got him, boys!"

The positive assurance in the marshal's voice angered Jim and steadied his nerve. The marshal had been so cocksure that Jim was a tough punk looking for an easy buck. *Damn you to hell*, Jim thought. *I'll never give you the satisfaction of knowing you were right.* He moved and they must have spotted him, for all four of the riders hit for cover. Larch Benton groaned and rolled over. He said, "You better get out of this, kid. Thanks for everything."

"Go to hell," Jim said. There were

man sounds in the brush and Jim knew they were spotted.

"Up there in the rocks!" It was Perry Grant's voice.

"I hear you," Jim said.

There was a hurried conference. Jim could hear the mutter of voices. The men had dismounted and they were crawling forward, screened by the undergrowth. The marshal must have recognized Jim's voice, for Perry Grant said, "You, kid—you were looking for a job, weren't you?"

Jim didn't answer. He was scared now, but it was a new kind of fear.

"You want to make a hundred bucks quick, kid?"

"How?"

"Come on out with your hands up. You can keep your gun and your horse. Start riding and forget you ever passed through Mayville."

"What about Larch Benton?"

"What do you care?"

I don't, I guess, Jim thought. He looked at the banker and those steady blue eyes were watching him. Jim felt as if he were perspiring, but he knew he wasn't. The banker said, "It's a pretty good offer."

"You got a better one "

The banker grinned. "I'll split what I get out of it," he said. "Fifty-fifty."

"What are you getting out of it?"

"The satisfaction of sticking by my own convictions, I guess," Larch Benton said.

"A hell of a poor price."

"Hey, up there!" The marshal's voice was strong, arrogant. "Listen, punk. The man offered you a hundred bucks."

"Suppose I don't take it?"

"Don't smart-talk me, punk," the marshal said.

"Shut up, Colley." They could hear Perry Grant's voice plainly. "Larch, can you hear me?"

"He hears you," Jim said.

"Listen, Larch, I'm not going to play any more, you hear? I'll give you ten

thousand cash if you'll sign over those notes. I'll make you a twenty thousand dollar loan for thirty days to stop the run on the bank."

"Tell him I'm not signing over any notes," Benton said weakly. "Tell him—"

"Tell him yourself," Jim said.

"Larch?" A long pause. "I'm waiting, Larch."

There was no answer.

"Hey, kid!" Perry Grant's voice was getting desperate. "I'll make it a hundred and fifty, kid."

Jim felt the wave of confidence that had been growing in him. He thumbed back the hammer of his uncle's gun. "If you want something up here," he called, "you better come up and get it."

Behind him he heard Larch Benton move. Benton said, "If you stuck a gun in my face now, kid, I'd be scared of you."

Jim didn't have time to puzzle out the remark. He heard the movement in the brush and then the first whine of lead off the face of the rock. His panic was intense, and then it was gone.

He calmly drew a bead on a movement in the brush. He saw himself squeeze the trigger. And he saw that the kid who was doing these things was a scared kid, but he was a kid with guts enough to go through with something, once he started it. A kid like that could go places. A kid like that wouldn't be whipped by cold and rain and an empty stomach. He fired again, and even with the recoil of the gun against the palm of his hand it was hard to realize that Jim Colliver and the gun-fighter were one and the same. He saw Perry Grant stagger out of the brush, a gun in his hand. He saw Grant try to lift that gun, and he saw him fail. He knew he had killed a man. Now it was real, and he was shaking like a leaf. The marshal's voice was charged with panic. "Larch, for God's sake, let's put a stop to this!"

"How about it, Benton?" Jim said softly.

Jim snapped a shot at Colley, the marshal, and he heard the man squawl.

"Larch, for the Lord's sake!" The marshal was whimpering like a pup.

"Get riding, Colley," Benton said. He had dragged himself to his knees and he was leaning against the rocks, but his voice was strong.

"You're gonna let him go?" Jim asked, bewildered.

"There's a sheriff in this country," Benton said, "who's wearing the right kind of badge. I sent for him two days ago, when I knew this was coming up. He'll be along and take care of Colley."

"And of me, maybe?" Jim asked. For just a second some of the old cynicism was back and he felt the corner of his mouth pull down.

"If I thought so," Benton said, "I'd tell you." He hung his head and his breathing was heavy. "As soon as they're gone you ride on down the trail until you come to a fence with a gate. Follow the lane to the house. Tell the girl there what happened and tell her how to get here."

He saw the worry in Jim's eyes and he said, "Don't be afraid to tell the girl everything. She's got guts. I know. She's my daughter."

IT WAS over two hours before Jim Colliver returned with the sheriff and the girl who had refused to hire him early this morning. That seemed like a hundred years ago. He still hadn't eaten a bite, but he didn't feel very hungry. He stood back and listened to the conversation and he helped when they loaded Larch Benton on a horse. The rest had given Benton new strength. "You're a stubborn damn fool, Larch," the sheriff said. "You'll get yourself killed for a bunch of people who appreciate nothing."

"Maybe they'll appreciate it next spring when they find out it's me holding their votes instead of Perry Grant."

"I doubt it like hell," the sheriff said.

Larch Benton managed a smile. "So what?" he said. "I'll sleep well."

The sheriff was a man who tried not to show his softness. "I hope you sleep the rest of the winter, while your neighbors cuss you out for busting the bank."

"He busted it loaning them money, didn't he?" the girl said. "If he hangs onto their notes they'll still have their ranches."

"You're getting to be a regular banker, Beth," Larch Benton said.

No, Jim Colliver thought, *you're not getting to be a regular banker. There's no such thing as a regular banker or a regular gunman or a regular anything. Whatever a man's trade is, it's only a tag. The regular part comes from what's under the hide—the kind of badge a man wears.* The sheriff was looking at him and now the lawman took a battered notebook out of his pocket. He fished a stub of pencil from his shirt and moistened it on his tongue. "I'll need your name first, young feller," he said.

"Jim Colliver," the kid said.

The sheriff held the pencil poised over the paper. He didn't look up. "A well known name," he said. "If you want to make it Bill Smith, just for the records, it's all right, I guess."

Jim looked at the girl and he looked at Larch Benton. "You better make it Colliver," he said. "I've got to learn to live with it." He thought of how close he had come to letting the name own him, but now, he knew, he owned the name and it could never hurt him. He saw the girl watching him and when he glanced at her she blushed. She was just a child. Sixteen or seventeen, maybe. He spit over the center of his lips. "Let's get movin', men," he said. "I ain't had a square meal for four days and I'm hittin' you folks up for a good feed, soon's we get Larch home."

Funny, he thought. *This morning that would have been asking for a handout.*

CATTLE COUNTRY QUIZ



By **HALLACK McCORD**

(Answers on page 107)

WHEN it comes to range savvy, can you tell Mexican strawberries from a handful of gravel? Or, in other words, do you know dried beans from sand? Test yourself on the twenty Western brain teasers below, and see how you rate. Answer eighteen or more of them and you're excellent. Answer sixteen or seventeen and you're still good. But answer fourteen or fewer, and you're only fair. Good luck!

1. If one Westerner said of another, "He don't act like a colt," what would he mean?
2. What is meant when a rancher is said to be "on the Black Hills?"
3. If the ranch boss told you to pick a horse up by his hind feet, what would you do?
4. True or false? A "piebald" horse is a spotted horse?
5. True or false? The Western slang term, "pulling bog," means to pull animals from bog holes.
6. What is a "puncture lady" in the Westerner's slang?
7. True or false? A "road agent spin" and a "Curly Bill spin" are the same thing.
8. What is the purpose of a "road brand?"
9. Which of the following is most likely to be referred to as a "saddle gun" by the true Westerner? A rifle? A shotgun? A revolver?
10. True or false? A "salea" is a soft piece of sheepskin placed under an animal pack as a pad.
11. If the ranch boss sent you out for a "slab-sided horse," which of the following should you return with? A thin horse? A fat horse? A mule?
12. "Silver thaw" is a term used in reference to which of the following? Early-morning dew? Rain which hits the ground and freezes? An especially heavy rain?
13. If a cowpoke asked you for some "snake water," what should you get for him?
14. What is the Western meaning of the word, "snubbed?"
15. If you had a lot of work to get done in a hurry, would you be likely to choose a "stick horse" to aid you in doing it?
16. True or false? A "straw shed" is a winter building made of poles and straw.
17. According to the Westerner's way of thinking, what is a "swimming horse?"
18. "Surly" is the cowpoke's slang expression for which of the following? A tough ranch boss? The sheriff? The camp cook? A bull?
19. True or false? A "Walker pistol" was a type of revolver used by early day Westerners.
20. What is the meaning of the Spanish word, "vaca?"



"After today
there'll be no quar-
rel between us. . ."

*"A fight that's worth winning, mister—is worth losing—an' I
figger to lose this one my way. Go for your gun—an' die!"*

GRAVE SUDDEN

By LEWIS B. PATTEN

COMING down the steep trail out of the cedars, Craig Richards sawed the sliding gray to a halt atop a small knoll and sat, strangely still in sundown's welcome coolness, surveying his little spread with its green, irrigated alfalfa fields and stout log buildings. Bushy brows pulled together over his calm gray eyes, and his sun-reddened face grew bleak with the memory of trouble that lay waiting on the point of the towering mesa behind him.

Damn a rangehog outfit that had to crowd first one little fellow and then another! "I've got to do somethin'!" he muttered with sudden savagery. "A man can't farm this country. It's get my back up or get out!"

He started on again, but drew rein a second time, seeing his seventeen-year-old son, Hank, moving about in the yard, doing chores, proud to the point of swaggering with the new Colt Peacemaker and belt strapped snugly about his middle. The

enormous ugly dog, Buck, followed closely at his heels.

Hotheaded was Hank, and the foreknowledge of what Hank's reaction to this trouble would be deepened the creases of worry in Craig's roughly molded face.

As he moved toward the house again, he steeled himself to show all the calmness and wisdom of which he was capable when he came up against the boy's and his mother's conflicting arguments.

Craig knew what Helen would want him to do—or rather not to do. And he knew as well that Hank would want to saddle up immediately and kill Abel Reuter—or try to. Somewhere between these two extremes he must find some course he could follow.

As he came into the yard, Hank heard him, whirled, his hand darting to his gun. Craig could not help smiling. Hank looked like a man, acted like one most of the time. But occasionally, as now, he did something that showed him up as just a kid.

The gun came level and Craig's eyes widened with surprise. The kid wasn't bad. He must've been practicing when he should have been irrigating.

Hank grinned engagingly. "How's that, dad?"

Craig tried to make his answering grin equally cheerful. He said, "Not bad. That thing ain't loaded, is it?"

Hank shook his tawny head, a tall boy, with clear, sun-reddened skin, laughing blue eyes, and a daredevil disposition that would not let him rest until he had tried everything. Hank rode the roughest horses, roped the biggest steers, danced with the prettiest girls he could find. And a fight to him was like a strong drink to any other man.

No, Hank would not counsel patience. The boy's face sobered and he asked, "What's the matter, dad? What you worried about?"

"Grass," said Craig laconically. "Or rather the lack of it."

"Reuter?" Hank's lips thinned dangerously.

Craig thought, *Oh, hell. I might as well tell him and get it over with.* He grunted, "Yep. He's moved five hundred steers down on us. Now we got to decide what to do about it."

"By Mighty, I know what to do! Wait, I'll get a horse!" the kid whirled, but Craig slammed a hand onto his shoulder, gripping with a strength that made the boy wince.

"Tomorrow, maybe. Take it easy. You think you can whip a dozen men all by yourself? It's my problem anyway—not yours." He hated using that tone, hated shutting the boy out like that, but Hank dead at Reuter's feet would help no one.

Hank's face grew huffy with anger and hurt pride. "Well, all right, if that's the way you feel about it?" he mumbled, and stalked away, still muttering, the big, shaggy mongrel at his heels.

Craig watched him go, and then, because he did not want to look at Hank's angrily stiff back, turned his eyes to the dog. Buck was gigantic. He looked fierce enough to whip a cougar, but it was all looks. Inside, he had the disposition of a spaniel. Craig had traded a scrubby colt for the dog at Hank's insistence three years ago, but the boy had been disappointed the first time he took the animal hunting. Now, Craig guessed, Hank would be disappointed in his father because he didn't go smoking up to the Diamond S looking for trouble.

Tiredly he unsaddled the gelding and turned him out. Then he went toward the house, trying to get the worry out of his eyes, trying to straighten his wide shoulders.

But Helen had seen them, father and son, talking in the yard and had not missed their expressions. Nor had she missed the

sag in Craig's shoulders and the frown of worry on his normally smooth brow.

Hands on hips, she met him at the door and her question was direct and unavoidable. "Reuter?"

He nodded, "Five hundred head down on our grass. I've got to do somethin' about it. But what?"

He felt her sudden tension, knew without looking, what expression his wife's face would be carrying. There would be panic, fear and resentment there, and he knew what her thoughts would be.

In a way he understood. She had been raised in this country and the scars of fear were something she would carry with her always. Her own father had been brought home dead, tied across his saddle like a sack of oats. Forever burned into her memory were the fights, the burned-out ranches, the wounded and the dead.

She cried, "You won't do anything! You'll keep right on running your cattle up there and there will have to be enough for both of you. I won't have any more fighting. You're no drifting puncher now. You're a family man with a wife and boy to think about. Besides, how can one man fight a big outfit like the Diamond S? You think you'll have a better chance than the others who tried?"

Craig ran a hand through his thinning hair. He felt like Buck, the dog, must have felt the time he got cornered by three coyotes, not knowing which way to turn, which of his three problems to tackle first.

Grinning ruefully, Craig wished his own action could be as simple as the dog's had been. Buck had merely bared his huge yellow fangs, growled in a way that assured the coyotes that he could and would gobble them all in one bite, and had backed away, hackles erect, until he had enough distance between himself and the coyotes to escape. Craig thought, *I ain't as ugly as Buck though. If he'd looked as peaceful as he really is, they'd*

have cut him to ribbons. It was bluff that put Buck in the clear.

He could see that Helen was angry at him for grinning. But beneath her anger he could also see her pathetic fear.

Defensively, he said, "You know what will happen, don't you? They're just putting their foot in the door this year to see what will happen. If nothing happens, then next year they'll shove their whole bunch down on my grass in the spring and as soon as it's gone, move back onto their own range, leaving me nothing." Helen's face remained set and unyielding. Craig raised his voice unconsciously. "If I do nothing, we had just as well give up this place and go somewhere else. Without cattle, we'd starve."

Her lips firmed with stubbornness. "You're more important to me than a little grass. I should think you could see that. And suppose you're killed? Do you think I could hold Hank? They'd get him too, just as they had you."

Craig felt cornered. He hadn't said anything about fighting Reuter. "There needn't be a fight," he murmured. "Sometimes it only takes a man that's willing to fight. Sometimes a bluff is strong enough." But he knew he was lying. No bluff could be any better than the man behind it.

Helen laughed, her usually serene face harsh and twisted with her fear. "Bluff!" Her voice was strident, shrill. "Abel Reuter is not a man to bluff!"

And Craig knew she was right. If he went up to the Diamond S tomorrow, he would have to be willing to fight. For only if he were willing to fight—and die—there would be any chance of bluffing Reuter.

SUPPER was silent and strained. Hank glowered at his plate, and Helen's face was pinched with worry. Afterward Craig escaped, going

outdoors. It was hard on a man to go against his own wife. If he followed the course he had halfway decided upon, he would have Hank's approval, but not Helen's. The other way, he would lose this ranch, his son's respect and, in the end, Helen's too.

The cool night breeze mingled the smells of alfalfa blossoms and corral and sagebrush, but Craig stood unnoticed. A cricket chirped and a horse nickered from the pasture. Moonlight etched patterns of shadow on the ground.

The feel of the night, the sounds and the smells, suddenly brought to him an awareness of these things around him, substantial things, solid and lasting—a home and a livelihood carved out of wilderness. There was a lot of himself in this place—twenty years of himself that he could not easily give up.

Impatiently he returned to the house and went to bed. But for a long while he did not sleep and when he did, his mind was made up.

In the morning, he slipped out before daylight, afraid that if he did not, Hank would either insist upon going or would do something foolish on his own hook. Helen lay stiffly and silently in bed as he dressed, awake he knew. It took him fifteen minutes to catch and saddle a horse. That done, he rode past the house and out toward the road. A hundred years from the house, he heard Helen's frantic call, "Craig! Craig, come back! Wait a minute!" and she came running after him, fully dressed.

He slid down from his horse, hardening his eyes against her pleading. But she did not plead. She came to his arms in a way that reminded him of the first months of their marriage.

"Craig," she murmured tearfully. "Craig, be careful." She pressed herself against him, letting him know he was not alone, and then stepped back. Craig, in the pre-dawn's dingy gray, could see

her white face watching until he turned out of sight with the road into a clump of boxelders.

He was conscious of the unaccustomed weight of holstered gun and belt around his middle and thought how long it had been since he had worn it. He went up the road for three hours at a steady trot before he brought the huge, sprawling shape of the Diamond S home spread into sight. He saw that there were five or six men lounging in front of the bunkhouse as he rode up and he noticed how they eyed him and the gun he wore.

Old Abel Reuter strode out of the blacksmith shop, still holding the hammer with which he had been shaping a horse-shoe and still holding the ruddy glow of the forge on his beefy face. The power this man wielded showed in the arrogant set of his wide shoulders, in the black-browed intolerance of his deep-set eyes.

Craig rode up to him, meeting those eyes, thinking how like a slab of granite was this man, and if there was doubt in Craig, he kept it carefully concealed. When Reuter spoke, his voice rumbled deep in his chest, more a growl than a greeting. "Get down, Craig."

"I'll have my say first," Craig told him levelly. "Then if you want, you can ask me again."

The knowledge of why Craig was here showed in Abel's rock-hard, waiting stance, in the wary eyes that rested for the briefest moment on the gun Craig wore.

Craig went on, "You've moved cattle onto my grass. I was on top yesterday and found them. You've run your iron on a lot of grass that didn't belong to you in the last couple of years and got away with it. With me you won't. I'm serving notice on you to start moving them off, commencing today."

Abel's eyes wavered before Craig's hard ones, signaling the punchers that Craig could feel shuffling closer behind him. He knew that it would take only one

wrong word, one wrong gesture, and they would close in, would overwhelm him with odds and force him to back down or get killed. He might get a couple before they got him, but that was not the way he intended to have this end.

He let his eyes bore straight into Abel's and rasped, "Well?"

Harshly Abel said, "This is an open range. Your claim on that grass is no better than mine."

Temper flowed with the blood that ran up into Craig's head, darkening his face. He barked, "You're a liar, Abel, and you know it! I've run cattle on that point for the last ten years. We've always got along, but by hell, I won't be squeezed out!"

One of the Diamond S riders came into his range of vision and the man was looking at Abel, waiting for the word to close in. Craig said in the softest way, "Ross, you get back. This is between your boss and me. I'm making this a personal quarrel."

With unwavering eyes on Reuter, Craig said in a hard, impatient tone, "Abel, you been wearing that gun ever since you started hoggin' range. Suppose you use it. We'll settle this right now. You're trying to make a grab and I aim to stop you. There's only one way I know to make it final. After today there'll be no quarrel between us. If it has to be—one of us'll die."

Turning his horse, he swung down, facing Reuter all this time, and slapped the animal on the rump, sending it, startled, across the yard. He spoke frostily over his shoulder, "If you jaspers are going to hang around, get over there where I can see you, an' don't interfere! If you do, Abel's getting it first!"

The nervousness kept building up in him and his movements were jerky and quick. He grew more dangerous as the moments fled. His steady watchfulness concealed his surprise at the hesitancy

that was obviously having its way with the big cattleman.

They stood this way for a long two minutes, Craig tense, very ready. He could see that Abel's mind was working swiftly. He watched Abel's eyes for the flicker that would come at the instant he moved to draw.

Abel spoke abruptly, his voice hoarse, unwittingly showing Craig a grudging admiration. "All right, Craig! But damn you, don't ever brace me if you're wrong!" Turning, he grunted, "Ross, saddle up and take four men. Push them cows off Craig's grass. Don't come back until it's done." The men moved off, quick relief in their hushed talk.

Craig still waited, surprised to an extent that made him reluctant to relax. Then he grinned, feeling no triumph, only a deep sense of relief. *A bluff*, he thought. *A big show of courage. That's all it takes.* But the thought did not ring true, even hidden in his mind. No bluff would have turned Abel Reuter aside. Abel had seen death in Craig, and it had sobered him, turned him cautious. Abel had been suddenly all alone, knowing himself to be the first to die if the guns came out. Looking at death, a man placed things in their proper order of importance.

Abel growled, "We'll draw back to, our own country. It ain't worth killing over," and, showing the slightest bit of grim humor, "I'm damned if I'll ever play poker with you, Craig! You'd call a man every time he bluffed."

Craig grinned. "Maybe so." He walked to his horse. He rode out to the road and headed again toward home.

Suddenly he drove the spurs in deep, hurrying, anxious to see his wife and his son, and they seemed all at once to be dearer to him than ever before. A rising exuberance brought a wide grin to his face and after another moment he laughed. The horse's galloping hoofs rang noisily on the hard-packed road.

By
M. KANE



HIGH IRON JOHN

Fast-riding, fast-shooting, the Renos traveled as far as lightning guns would take 'em—and for a bad life, they found it good—to the last gallows drop!

As the train pulled to a stop, Reno climbed into the cab. . . .

IN THE '60's, the railroads went West—and the West, in the persons of the four fabulous Reno brothers, promptly replied by inventing the train robbery. For the record, it was on the night of October 6, in '66, that this invention first was tried, and found successful, to the total of \$13,000.

They say that nothing succeeds like suc-

cess—and for the next three years, the surest thing about the Ohio & Mississippi Line, surer than timetables or taxes, was the next raid. The Renos got to be regular customers, punching their own kind of hole in their own kind of ticket with reckless frontier guns.

Until the Pinkertons and the Vigilantes declared themselves in on the enterprise, it seemed that the Renos would ride as long as the railroads ran. And yet, there was nothing about the brothers, as their neighbors knew them, to suggest such signal success, even in a life of crime. Their one brilliant contribution to the history of frontier outlawry seems to have been a natural result of an almost unnatural stupidity. Where other night riders were occasionally inhibited by the thought that a few things belonged to somebody else, the Renos were troubled by no such realization. From earliest childhood, they appropriated anything they wanted that they saw—and what they didn't want, they destroyed.

The Civil War record of John, the eldest, was a beautiful case in point. The fact that southern Indiana, where he'd grown up, was Confederate by sympathy and inclination, didn't complicate his course of action. Where a John Wesley Hardin—that strangely complex and frightening figure—may have gone bad through sheer pressure of divided loyalties, John Reno went wrong for the inventive fun of it. He enlisted in the Union Army to get the bounty therein implied. Bounty received, Reno deserted. No qualms, no trouble.

It seemed the natural thing to do.

And because there were obvious penalties attached to desertion, even in that thinly populated reach of the flag, he changed his name. At this point in the history of any other celebrated badman of the West, the next trail would be the crooked, dark one into hiding.

Not for single-minded, simple John

Reno. Having changed his name, and gotten away with it for a few weeks, he enlisted in the Union Army again, under his fortunate new name, now forgotten, and collected another bounty. Then he left town, the happiest male in the war, thinking up a third name to call himself when he hit the next recruiting station. As long as the war lasted, Reno and the three younger brothers who went into this enterprise with him were never without cash or employment. As almost-soldiers, they fared substantially better than any hero in blue or gray—and besides, they never killed anyone.

They waited till the war was over.

Came peace, and with it the problem—for the Renos—of business reconstruction. To John, Frank, Simeon and William, it was a period of adjustment and compromise. Where they had swindled the U.S., they were now forced to make a living by stealing corn and pigs and harness gear from outlying farms. To keep themselves in clothing, they rode the countryside on washday and merely stole what they found on clotheslines, trusting to luck that enough of it would fit to pay for the effort.

Plain boys, country boys, riding their merry youth away without a care in the world. Tradition says that they were big-boned, graceful, handsome, a stirring sight against the horizon of the plains. But they weren't popular. Sometimes, when a rancher or homesteader complained that he'd had enough of them, they would visit him on a bright or moonless night—for the Renos, it didn't matter which—and set his house on fire, and shoot the brains out of his cattle. If a bullet lodged in the rancher too, the Renos weren't ones to worry.

There was, of course, law of a sort, even in Jackson County. But the boys cheerfully earmarked a percentage of whatever loot they took for the local politicians. In the saloons on Saturday night, and the tawdriest dancehall, they were

known as free spenders and the best of good fellows.

For a bad life, they found it good.

It must be stated that there was a fifth Reno, Clinton. But he belonged no better than a fifth wheel usually does. Clinton, said his four brothers compassionately, was *loco*. From sunup till sunset, six days a week, he tilled his acres and called it a livelihood. Folks around Jackson County referred to him as Honest Reno, a sort of contradiction in terms, but it described him. This dull fellow was not in on the invention of the train robbery. But eventually he was to play his role in the family history.

Came a day when John, the so-called brains of the clan, got tired of wearing stolen second hand clothes and eating stolen pig. He had organized the lawless element of the area into a ruthless gang of killers, and the profits of local thievery and murder just weren't enough for them.

He wanted to expand. He dreamt of far horizons in banditry. He thought of what it would be like to steal cash instead of britches.

And so, on that famous evening of October 6, the four brothers boarded the O. & M. coach at Seymour, Indiana, sat quietly for about a mile, and then went forward to the baggage car. In the vestibule of the car, they had the grace to stop long enough to mask their faces—a gesture that later proved to be more or less a sop to public opinion, as the crime was too flagrant for the brothers' identity to be a mystery for long, and they weren't even counting on it.

They pointed their pistols at the express messenger on guard, took his keys, and opened the safe he was watching. Then they pocketed the thirteen thousand in currency the safe had held, pulled the emergency cord, and when the train stopped, bade the terrified messenger a hasty farewell.

The affair had repercussions, naturally.

The O. & M. was upset—so was the express company. The bought politicians of Jackson County had to placate them somewhat—so they indicted John and Simeon Reno for the brand new crime of train robbery, and that was that.

The case never came to trial.

Nor did the county law—it might well have been called Reno County, by that time—bother with any further gestures, the next time John and his simple siblings robbed the O. & M. It would have been a waste of public funds—and the politicians and the Renos had other plans for the public funds.

IT WAS FUN while it lasted. It was a monotonous, easy, wonderful way to make ready cash, as good or better than bounty-jumping had been during the war between the States. If big John Reno had been content to stick with the O. & M. as its steadiest commuter till the end of his days, he might have made out all right.

But a combination of dangerous ideas had taken root in his consciousness. Idea number one: if you are John Reno, you may take possession of anything you can carry. Idea number two: since there are trains, there are places farther than Jackson County.

One night, the town treasurer of a straggling little hamlet on the county's outskirts was awakened by night riders thinly disguised as masked men. They helped themselves to the town's funds without so much as a thank you, and rode away. Later, other towns had the same experience—everyone knew it was John and his brothers. But what could they do about it?

And then John did the foolish thing, the wrong thing, as abysmally unprofitable as his invention had been the opposite. He crossed state lines and appropriated the town treasury of Gallatin in Davies County, Missouri.

Missouri authorities angrily enlisted the aid of the man who had organized the U.S. Secret Service—Allan Pinkerton.

Pinkerton's problem was to get John Reno back into Davies County to be arrested and stand trial. Accordingly, he and his operatives drifted separately into Seymour, and, posing as saloon characters, became friendly with the outlaw. On a given day, they suggested to him that he stroll with them down to the station, and watch the O. & M. express come in.

John, of course, was as happy to look the express over, any time, as a rancher is to count his herds.

But this train was different. As it pulled to a stop, Reno's erstwhile friends surrounded him and stuck their guns in his ribs. Six deputies from Missouri and the sheriff of Davies County, armed with a warrant, were waiting in the coach to receive him as he was hustled aboard.

Gone were the halcyon days forever, for the biggest of the Renos. Over his bitter protests that the rules were being violated, a Missouri court sentenced him to twenty-five years.

Back in Seymour, Honest Reno followed his plow and shook his head. Frank, Simeon and Willie, robbed of their natural leader, did what he had kept them from doing for eight years. They took to the long trail in earnest, like any other badmen, instead of continuing operations where they were known, and where the rest of the citizenry was helpless against them.

They were inviting a fate so horrible, so just, so simple, that it could only have happened to the brothers of big John Reno.

Cutting a swath across three states, the last of the Renos continued to rob trains and town treasuries. From Indiana to Iowa, wherever the night was quiet, they rode in and helped themselves. The spree lasted nearly a year.

Now the whole countryside was roused

against them. Once more the Pinkertons were called in. William Pinkerton, Allan's son, followed the gang to Council Bluffs. There he discovered them hiding out in the home of one of the richest men in Iowa. True to John's old formula of making friends with the rich or powerful, the brazen remnant of the Renos had approached one Michael Rogers with the following attractive proposition: that if he would describe the interior of the county tax office to them, and give them sanctuary, they would get back his taxes for him. As an extensive property owner, Rogers had found the bait irresistible.

Pinkerton trapped Frank Reno and two henchmen—after the treasury had been raided—having breakfast in Rogers' kitchen. He committed them to the Glenwood, Iowa, jail. There they remained until April 1, 1868. When the sheriff brought his prisoners' breakfast that morning, he discovered a large hole in the jail wall through which his tenants had fled. Scribbled on the floor was the parting message, "April Fool."

In May of that year, the gang stole \$96,000 from an express car on the long-suffering O. & M.

IN FARAWAY Missouri, John Reno chalked off another month of the hundreds he had yet to serve. In Jackson County, Honest Reno planted his spring wheat. In Seymour, in New Albany, in Brownstown, in all the Main Streets where men came with their buckboards, hungry for talk after the winter-bound months of freeze and the spring-bound months of thaw, a popular idea was growing like the season's crops, and it concerned the three riding Renos.

Folks thought it was time to hang them.

It was called the Secret Vigilance Committee of Southern Indiana, but it wasn't so much a committee as an idea—a big, easy, uncomplicated idea, like the Reno formula for making a dishonest living.

Nor was the idea particularly secret.

Here and there, scattered members of the now-worried gang were picked up in the commission of robbery. The Vigilantes plucked them from the law, easy as robbing a treasury, and strung them up.

Frank, Simeon and Willie still were at large somewhere, as were most of their band. But they were afraid, at last, to continue operations.

No matter. A man suspected of being one of the Reno riders, even if he were eschewing robbery for the time being, might be safe from the law. But not from a flogging at the hands of the Committee.

By autumn of 1868, the Pinkertons and the Renos closed final accounts, with the apprehension and arrest of the three fugitive brothers. Knowing the lynch temper of the country, the detectives lodged their prizes in the jail at New Albany, Indiana, considered the strongest and safest in that part of the West.

One night in November, fifty masked men boarded a train bound for New Albany, just as the Renos had boarded it first, so many months before. But the masks were only a sop to public opinion, as the Renos' masks had been. . . . everyone knew who they were, and what they wanted.

It wasn't legal. But there was something lying around the county jail that they happened to want, and they would

take it, simply and easily, as the Renos had taken what they wanted. . . .

They battered their way in, leaving a yawning hole in the wall where the door had been. It was too late in the year to write a message on the floor, a message like "April Fool." Besides, who would be left to read it?

They stood them under the jail rafters, the three big fair-haired brothers who had ridden so wide and freely, and put ropes around their necks and hanged them dead.

The years passed. In Jefferson City, old John Reno was released from prison ten years before the expiration of his actual sentence, having won time for good behavior.

If there were thousands and thousands in currency, buried or cached in the three-state area—and legend said there were, and treasure-seekers were always searching, fruitlessly, for the Reno hoard—John didn't care. He went back to Seymour, where he had misspent his long-gone boyhood. Honest Reno took him in.

Others, from Jesse James on, had carried on in the interim. John Reno's invention—train robbery—had lived and spread, instead of dying with his brothers.

Honest Reno mended his fences. John helped where he could. Thinking about the past, and his big idea, he wasn't sure it had been such a big thing after all. But it was something to have a home. There was nothing, after all, like a brother.



JAYNE'S P-W tablets KILL PIN-WORMS

(You may have them and not know it)

Fidgeting, nose-picking and a tormenting rectal itch are often tell-tale signs of Pin-Worms . . . ugly parasites that medical experts say infest one out of every three persons examined. Entire families may be victims and not know it.

To get rid of Pin-Worms, these pests must not only be killed, but killed in the large intestine where they live and multiply. That's exactly

what Jayne's P-W tablets do . . . and here's how they do it: First—a scientific coating carries the tablets into the bowels before they dissolve. Then—Jayne's modern, medically-approved ingredient goes right to work—kills Pin-Worms quickly and easily.

Don't take chances with this dangerous, highly contagious condition. At the first sign of Pin-Worms, ask your druggist for genuine Jayne's P-W Vermifuge . . . the small, easy-to-take tablets perfected by famous Dr. D. Jayne & Son, specialists in worm remedies for over 100 years.

JAYNE'S P-W for
PIN-WORMS

THE MAN THAT HELL FORGOT

By
GEORGE MICHENER

Halfway up the rock face he
slipped and fell. . . .



*All his life Old
John had listened
for the siren call of the
wild, bloody trails—
till at last he heard
their bullet-whisper—
“Ride out—or die!”*

HE WAS old—he had been born at the turn of the century—and his memory had a way of transposing fact and fancy, but his body was reasonably spry and his ears and eyes still were good.

His eyes were especially good. From

where he sat now in the sun by the back of the barn he could see the far corner of the corral and he could even distinguish the loom of the cottonwoods beyond. Beyond that the earth and sky blended in a warm haze, and in the haze he saw the shape of many secret things. . . .

He spoke to the ten year old boy beside him. “This afternoon,” he said, “we’ll find it. We’ll saddle up right after we eat.”

"Not today," the boy said sadly. "I got to go to Miz Berger's weddin'. We can go tomorrow, can't we, Uncle John?"

He thought deeply. What was today? Monday? Could it be Thursday? "Is tomorrow Sunday?" he asked craftily.

"Tomorrow's Friday," said the boy.

Then today was ham day. Thursdays Emma always had ham. A thick slice of ham swimming in milk gravy. There was nothing better. Absolutely nothing! His mouth began to water.

"Mom says there ain't no Rustler's Trail. She says that's just talk. She says folks just made up that story about Tug Madden's gang usin' a hidden trail."

"There's things," he said, "that women don't know about."

"D'you think we'll find the trail this time, Uncle John?"

"We'll find it," he said with conviction. "I've been sittin' here studyin'. I know now just how to go. You go up the gorge and—" He put a skinny, knob-jointed hand on the boy's shoulder. "You got to promise, Eddy. If I show you the trail, you won't tell no one?"

"I won't tell, Uncle John. Not anyone!"

"I might want to use it some time, Eddy. I might have to!"

The boy shivered deliciously. "Did you really know Tug Madden? Were you really and truly a bandit once, Uncle John?"

"I was," he said. "It was a long time ago, Eddy. Your pop and mom don't know anything about it—but I was. I used to—" He gave a violent start and turned as the voice of authority sounded directly behind him.

"You, Eddy! Now you get up! Sitting in that dirt in your clean overalls! You march to the house and wash yourself!"

Eddy stood up. He dragged toward the house.

Emma remained where she was. She was wearing her blue going-out dress and

high button shoes. "Rustler trails!" she said witheringly. "Bandits! Honestly, Uncle John, I don't know what to do with you. I've asked you and asked you. Why do you have to keep telling him those awful fibs? You'll have him jumping in his sleep."

His head moved helplessly. There wasn't any use telling her they weren't fibs. She wouldn't believe him. No one believed him.

Emma strode briskly off.

"Emma," he called plaintively. "You goin' to have ham?"

Emma didn't answer. She disappeared around the side of the barn.

Presently he heard Tom coming up behind him, walking heavily, not trying to sneak up on him like Emma had. Tom had on new overalls and a white shirt and his serge coat. "We're goin' now, Uncle John."

"Well, I ain't goin' to no weddin'! I don't have to, do I, Tom?"

"No," said Tom. "You can stay here. We'll be back before dark. There's feed in the mangers, so all you got to do is open the door and let the horses in. Emma's set out grub for you and the coffee's made. Don't forget about the horses."

"I won't," he promised.

"And be careful of matches. You ain't got any on you, have you?"

"Not a one, Tom."

"Well, remember about the horses." Tom walked away.

"Tom," he called, "did Emma set out the ham?"

But Tom was gone. Tom didn't care if he had ham or not. No one cared. All they did was give him orders. Telling him when to go to bed and when to change his shirt. Not even letting him have matches. As if it was his fault the hay caught on fire that time.

He heard the rattle of the buckboard. They were going now—Tom, Emma and

Eddy. Off to a wedding and leaving him all alone. . . Just a poor, lonely old man sitting in the sun. . .

It wasn't right. They treated him like a child. And Emma just the same as calling him a liar right to his face! One of these days she'd be sorry. He'd show her how much of a liar he was! He'd go away and never come back. And when he did come back he'd be carrying a bag of gold and a pocketful of rings and watches. Then they'd know!

He climbed into the corral. There were three horses here; Tom's lively young gelding, Eddy's buckskin pony and old Brownie. He remembered the apple core he had slipped into his pocket last night, and he fed it to Brownie. Then he entered the barn.

He went into Brownie's stall and reached down in the narrow opening between the stall sheathing and the side of the barn. He brought up a crumpled ball of black cloth. The cloth was the residue of some of Emma's dressmaking projects. When spread out it showed two holes, dollar-size and spaced about as far apart as a man's eyes. Three .44 caliber cartridges—originally Tom's property—glinted from the folds of the cloth. For a moment he gazed grimly at these objects, then he carefully replaced them in their hiding place.

"I'll show 'em," he muttered. "They'll find out!"

He left the barn, scuffing toward the house. He entered the kitchen and with a mixture of eagerness and apprehension he lifted the square of cheesecloth Emma, as a defensive measure against flies, had placed over the things on the table. Beneath the cheese-cloth were a cup and saucer, bread, butter and jelly, two peeled eggs and a covered frying pan. With a gusty sigh of relief he dropped the cloth.

He glanced up at the shelf clock. Ten after eleven. Early—and yet maybe not too early—not by the time he got the

fire going. There were still a few live embers in the stove. He piled in more wood and pulled the coffee pot to the front of the stove.

While he waited for the fire to reach the proper heat for coffee boiling and ham frying he wandered into Tom's and Emma's bedroom. He opened the bottom drawer of Tom's chest of drawers and felt under the pile of clean winter underwear. He brought out Tom's revolver.

He stuck the gun in the waistband of his levis, cuffed his hat to one side and scowled sternly at himself in the mirror. He strolled back into the kitchen.

He stood in the middle of the kitchen, gazing blankly at the coffeepot and pretending moody abstraction. Suddenly he drew the revolver, whirled toward the open outside door and clicked the hammer.

THERE was a movement by the doorway and a roar of protest. "You damned old fool! This is Sheriff Crew! Drop that gun!"

He dropped the gun on the table. He was so startled that for a moment his heart seemed to stop beating.

Sheriff Hampy Crew poked a red, angry face around the side of the door. "You tryin' to kill someone?"

"No," he answered weakly. "It ain't loaded. Tom never leaves it loaded. 'I didn't see you, Hampy. I swear I didn't!'"

Sheriff Crew came heavily into the kitchen. He examined the gun and tossed it back on the table. "What you doin' with it?" he asked fiercely.

"Nothin'. I was just goin' to clean it. Tom asked me to."

"Yeah?" The sheriff sounded skeptical. "Where's Tom now?"

"Him and Emma and Eddy went to Sally Berger's weddin'. They're—" He glanced out the door and against the bright sunlight he could see the shadow-like forms of several mounted men. Were those rifles they were carrying? All at

once he realized that the sheriff meant business; he had brought along a posse! In quick alarm he cried, "Who you after, Hampy? Tom didn't do nothin', did he?"

"No," replied the sheriff. "Not that I know of."

"You—you ain't after me, are you, Hampy?"

The sheriff permitted himself a smile. "No," he said in a gentle voice. "We ain't after you, Uncle John. We're after a couple hardcases that drifted into town late last night and stuck up the poker game at Purdy's saloon. You didn't see any strangers go by here early this mornin', did you? One kind of fat and the other kind of skinny and both of 'em needin' a shave?"

Regretfully he shook his head. "I didn't see nobody, Hampy."

The sheriff scratched himself and frowned at the floor.

Uncle John cleared his throat. Tentatively he said, "You know, I used to be a sheriff once, Hampy. I never told nobody before."

The sheriff grunted.

"Yes, sir!" said Uncle John in a more assured tone. "Many's the outlaw I brung in in my time."

The sheriff was silent; he hadn't heard.

Uncle John sighed. "You don't know who they were?" he asked.

"Eh?" The sheriff moved his head irritably. "No," he muttered. "Not for sure. But if they turn out to be the ones we think they are, they're real bad ones and got the old noose waitin' for 'em."

"Are you sure they came this way, Hampy?"

"Yeah," replied the sheriff gloomily, "we're sure of that much. They're headin' for the hills. They'll try to get over the hump somewhere, but we ain't sure just where."

Uncle John felt a new warm regard for the perplexed sheriff. He wanted mightily to help him. He thought hard.

"Hey!" called someone from outside. "You comin', Hampy?"

"Comin'." Still frowning, the sheriff went out the door.

The sheriff was disappointed in him. Uncle John could see that. The sheriff had appealed to him for aid, and he had let the sheriff down. All at once he had an idea. "Now wait!" he cried excitedly. "I'll get my boots on and go along! I know them hills better'n anybody. I'll find 'em for you! You just wait a minute, Hampy."

He rushed into his own room. His fingers were all thumbs as he fumbled with his shoelaces. Finally he got his shoes off and reached for his riding boots. The boots were hand-me-downs and a bit small. A top seam of one boot was split and in his haste to pull the boot on he split the seam almost to the ankle. He climbed back to the kitchen, grabbed the gun from the table and stuffed it in his waistband. He hurried to the door.

"All right," he announced breathlessly. "I'll be with you soon as I get my horse. I'll show you boys right where—" He paused, staring into the bright, misting sunlight, turning his head from side to side. "Hampy!" he yelled. "Hampy!"

There was no answer.

He ran across the ranchyard. He tripped and fell full length in the dust. He lifted his head. "Hampy!" he shrieked. "Wait!"

But the sheriff and his posse were gone. They hadn't bothered to wait. He was alone again. He licked his lips and tasted the dry, bitter dust. The hot stillness pressed down upon him. He was tired. He wanted to lie here forever; he never wanted to get up. He rested his head on his arm and sobbed softly, fretfully. . . .

He climbed wearily to his feet. He returned to the kitchen.

The fire was going strongly now. The coffeepot was beginning to grumble. He

put the covered frying pan on the stove. The pan started to sizzle. His nostrils flared eagerly, savoring the smell of frying ham. He picked up a fork and lifted the pan cover. He stared numbly. His imagination had betrayed him; there was no ham. There was only a soggy mass of fried apples, leftovers from last night's supper.

His first impulse was to hurl the frying pan across the kitchen. Then, as the full weight of his miseries struck him, he was suddenly and drearily indifferent. It was too much. A man could stand just so much—and then he could stand no more. Now he was going away. He had thought about it often. Now he was going.

He replaced the pan lid quietly, not banging it. He checked the stove draft so there'd be no danger of a conflagration. When he left the house he closed the door carefully so there'd be no flies.

He went to the barn. He'd forgotten to shut the door from the corral, and the horses were in their stalls eating hay. He saddled old Brownie. He reached down behind the stall sheathing and pulled up the ball of black cloth with the eyeholes cut in it. He had only one corner of the cloth in his grip, and the cloth suddenly unrolled, spilling out the three .44 caliber cartridges. One of the cartridges struck him on the leg.

He stooped, groping in the shadow-dark litter of straw and manure. If he had had a match he might have found the cartridges. But he had no match, and the cartridges were lost. Not that it mattered greatly. Nothing mattered now. Devil take everything! He wiped his hands on the black cloth and flung it petulantly away.

He led Brownie out of the barn and climbed into the saddle. He left the ranch yard, heading toward the hills and Kearney George. He had gone this way often—as many times as he and Eddy had set out to find the lost Rustler's Trail.

Always they had made a wrong turning somewhere and landed in a blind canyon. Now, though, as he had told Eddy earlier in the day, he was quite sure of himself; he knew exactly where he had made his previous mistakes. This time he'd find Rustler's Trail. And when a man knew that secret he could flit through the hills like a ghost—and neither Hampy Crew nor all his posses could catch up with him.

He wondered what Tom and Emma would say when they got back from the wedding and found him gone. Emma especially.

Poor Uncle John. He used to like ham so much. And when I think how we treated him—

He snuffed and brushed his sleeves across his eyes.

THE AFTERNOON sun sank. A thin cattle trail followed the bank of a shallow creek. Old Brownie plodded along the trail with sedate patience. The trail left the creek and climbed a slight rise. At the top of the rise Brownie halted. Uncle John sat stiffly in the saddle, not showing surprise nor the fear that stabbed through him like a paralyzing knife thrust.

There was a depression here—a sort of pot-hole—maybe fifty feet across and sparsely covered with grass. A few scraggly pines grew on the low, sloping embankment that rimmed it. On the far side of this pot-hole two saddle horses grazed. Nearby were two men—a skinny man and a fat man. They had whiskery faces—just as the sheriff had described them. And each had a gun pointed at Uncle John's lean belly.

"Get down!" ordered the fat man.

He almost tumbled from the saddle. When he struck the ground his legs scarcely would support him. "Boys," he quavered, "I—"

"Shut up!" said the skinny man. He

took away Uncle John's gun; he went through his pockets. "Clean," he said. He examined the gun. "Empty!" he exclaimed. He balanced the gun on his palm, hesitated a moment, then contemptuously thrust the gun back under Uncle John's waistband. "What you doin' here?" he demanded savagely.

"I—I—" Uncle John shook his head. "I got to sit down, boys." His knees suddenly bent and he sat on the ground. "That's no way to handle him," said the fat man severely. "You want to scare him to death?"

The skinny man shrugged. "You handle him," he suggested.

The fat man holstered his gun. He squatted on his heels beside Uncle John. "Now look, pop," he said earnestly, "we don't want to hurt you. You tell the truth and everythin's goin' to be fine, but one little lie, and we jerk your gizzard out. You understand, pop?"

Uncle John nodded. He understood only too well. The sheriff had been right again. These two really were bad ones.

"Now then," said the fat man, "what're you doin' here, pop?"

He wet his lips. "I—I'm goin' to Cass Town."

"Cass Town," said the skinny man, "is an old minin' town just across the hump. Nobody's lived there for years. He's lyin'."

"No, I ain't, boys! I swear I ain't lyin'! There's still houses in Cass Town, ain't there? Well, I'm goin' to live in one." The two desperados contemplated him in stony silence. Feebly he added, "I'm runnin' away. My nephew and his wife don't treat me right."

"Well!" said the fat man. "Ain't that a shame!"

"He's lyin'," said the skinny man. "I know a little about this neck o' the woods. How's he goin' to get past that bluff back there? If he wanted to get to Cass Town he'd take the road over the hump.

He wouldn't be wanderin' around here."

"Didn't you boys never hear of Rustler's Trail?"

"No," said the skinny man.

"Tug Madden used to use it. You've heard of him, ain't you?"

"Tug Madden," said the fat man, "has been dead twenty years."

"Sure he has. But he used to hang out in Cass Town and come into the basin here by a secret trail that nobody knowed but him."

"A secret trail, eh?"

Uncle John nodded violently. "It's the truth, boys! And I know where it is—anyways I think I do. You got to cross the creek a little above here and go over the ridge and down into the gorge and then—"

"Never mind," said the fat man.

"He ain't lyin'," said the skinny man. "He's just crazy."

The fat man stood up and turned his back on Uncle John. "We got to get movin'," he said.

"Which way we goin'?" asked the skinny man. "Down into the valley again? Not me! I'd sooner look for secret trails. And we can't climb that bluff back there."

"We can follow it till we find a break somewhere, can't we?"

"Sure," said the skinny man sourly. "Or until we find a posse somewhere. What'll we do with the old buzzard? If we turn him loose he'll have 'em on our trail in no time."

"We'll get him on ice," said the fat man. "Tie up his crow bait so it won't go wanderin' home. And bring a lass-rop."

The skinny man tied Brownie to a tree. He brought a rope. The fat man pulled Uncle John's arms behind him and lashed his wrists together, pushed him on his side and lashed his ankles to his wrists.

"We'd ought to shoot the crazy old buzzard and be done with it," the skinny man grumbled. He took out his gun and

cocked it. "Pop," he said in a snarling voice, "we're goin' down the hill a ways, and if you let out one yip, I'm comin' back and fixin' you! You hear?"

Uncle John nodded.

The two outlaws got on their horses and departed. Uncle John lay with his mouth open and gasping. His old heart was pounding. After a while his breathing quieted somewhat. The sun slipped westward; the whole pot-hole was shadowed.

He tugged gently at his bonds and groaned. His wrists hurt; his legs were starting to cramp. How long had he been lying here? Ten minutes? An hour?

"Help!" he called faintly.

He waited, his heart pounding again. There was no sign of the skinny man. No sound save the crack of a twig under one of Brownie's hoofs. Or had it been Brownie? There were mountain lions in these hills. He hadn't thought of that before. And with night coming on—

Suddenly he began a frantic struggling, his grunted body threshing from side to side. "Help!" he shouted wildly. "Tom! Help!"

His eyes opened and he lifted his head. Had that been a distant shout he had heard? Could it be Tom? Had Tom missed him when he returned home from the wedding and set out to look for him? What a story he'd have to tell Tom! And this time Tom would believe him—even Emma would believe him this time! He drew a long breath to send an answering shout—and held it.

There was sound from a different direction—just beyond the rise and coming this way—the sound of hurrying horses. Maybe it was Hampy Crew and his posse. Or maybe— His breath went out in a low moan of terror. It was the two outlaws!

THEY RODE into the pot-hole on badly winded horses and dismounted beside him. The fat man was having an argument with his partner.

"I don't give a damn if he is crazy!" he was saying savagely. "He was goin' somewheres, wasn't he? And that's more'n we've been doin'. How many more posses d'you want to run into?"

"No more," replied the skinny man sullenly. "I just said—"

"Hist!" The fat man motioned. "What's that?"

Uncle John knew exactly what it was; the shout had sounded closer this time and considerably louder. It was Tom and no mistake!

"Whoo-e-ee! Uncle John!"

"Balls o' fire!" cried the skinny man. "It's someone huntin' the old buzzard! Keep him shut."

The fat man clapped a hand over Uncle John's mouth. The skinny man drew his gun, ran across the pot-hole and climbed the embankment.

"See him?" asked the fat man.

"Yeah, I see him. Just one rider and comin' this way. Now he's stopped. He's gettin' down and strikin' a match. He—" The skinny man cursed quietly and luridly. "He's seen our tracks!"

"Can you get him from there?"

"Not for sure. It's too far and he's right by a patch of brush."

"We got to get him," said the fat man decisively. "If he goes back he'll have that damn posse on our trail again. Now wait! I'll bring him in. You get set."

The fat man took his hand from Uncle John's mouth. "Holler for help," he ordered. "Holler out that you got a busted leg."

Uncle John clamped his mouth shut. He wasn't going to bait Tom in to his death. Nothing in the world could make him do a thing like that. The fat man gripped the back of his neck with cunningly placed fingers.

"Holler," said the fat man.

"Tom," he wailed weakly.

The fat man squeezed his neck again.

"Loud!" he said fiercely. "Real loud!"

Uncle John had never been so frightened in his life. Frightened because he knew now he was going to do as the fat man ordered—it was the only thing he could do. He was going to holler. He hollered; he filled his lungs and shouted as loudly as he could. "Tom!" he shouted. "Run! They'll shoot you! Ru—"

Something hit him on the side of the head; maybe it was a rock or maybe it was the fat man's gun. He lay limply, his nose pressed into the dirt. Remotely he heard a shot. Later he heard the two outlaws talking.

The fat man was speaking almost in his ear. "Get water," he was saying. "Fill your hat at the creek."

He felt the fat man working at the rope on his wrists and ankles. He was lifted erect and water struck his face.

They walked him. He reeled and staggered. All at once his head was feather-light and exceedingly clear. "Listen," he said, "I got a rock in my boot."

"To hell with rocks," said the skinny man. "He's all right now."

He was boosted onto old Brownie. He clung there with both hands.

The fat man rode up close beside him. "Pop," he said, "you're goin' to show us that trail to Cass Town. You hear?"

"Sure I hear." Did the fat man think he was deaf? Or maybe they thought he didn't know the way to Cass Town. He kicked old Brownie in the ribs. "Boys," he said, "you jus' foller me."

They crossed the creek and the ridge beyond and angled down into the gloomy mouth of Kearney Gorge. They went up the gorge and turned in at the opening of a wide, low-banked canyon.

The fat man called a halt. He tilted his head alertly. "I heard something," he said. "Sounded like two shots somewhere behind us."

"Signalin'," muttered the skinny man. "Someone's picked up our trail maybe."

Uncle John sat humped in the saddle. His head no longer felt so feather-light; now it was heavy and aching. Now he was reminded that he too had heard a shot.

His thought processes worked laboriously. . . . He had cried out a warning to Tom and the fat man had hit him and then he had heard the shot. Who had fired the shot? The skinny man?

". . . Don't like it," the skinny man was saying. "I got an idea the old buzzard's tryin' to lead us into a trap."

"No he ain't," said the fat man. "He's too scared for that."

The two outlaws gazed ominously at Uncle John.

He stared back at them with widening eyes. "Boys," he asked shakily, "where's my nephew Tom?"

"Pop," said the skinny man, "I'm glad you asked that. Tom's dead. Deader'n a herrin'. I killed him. And if you give us a bum steer on this trail business, you're next! Now get goin'!"

He went on. He led the way up a cattle trail that climbed out of the canyon and disappeared on the grassy slope of a long hogback. He crossed the hogback and descended into a second canyon. This canyon was high-banked, and a small stream of water ran along the bottom.

Uncle John licked his dry lips. "Boys," he murmured plaintively, "I'm thirsty. I'd like awful well to get a drink."

The outlaws offered no objections.

Uncle John got off his horse and drank at the stream. He plunged his aching head under the water. He felt better after that. He stood up and rediscovered that there was a pebble in his boot. He sat down and took off the boot—the one with the split seam. He dumped out the pebble and put the boot on again. The pebble lay between his feet.

He poked at the pebble with a shaking finger. It wasn't a pebble at all—it was a .44 caliber cartridge! It was one of

the three cartridges he had dropped in the barn.

He leaned forward as if examining his boots. His hands, hidden by his belly, worked frantically. He stuffed the cartridge into his gun and stuffed the gun back in his waistband. He arose and sauntered to his horse.

THE OUTLAWS hadn't noticed what he had done. They were too busy watching the skyline. Uncle John looked, too. He could see nothing.

The skinny man saw something, though, for suddenly he cried out, "There they are!" He was silent a moment, then he exclaimed, "Six! There was only five in that posse before. I know now how they picked up our trail so fast!"

"I told you what would happen," said the fat man.

The skinny man pointed at Uncle John.

"He's the one," he cried furiously.

"Him and his hollerin'! For two cents I'd—"

"For two cents," said the fat man, "you'd throw away the only chance we got. He's our only chance now!"

Uncle John led them on up the canyon. He wondered nervously what he was going to do with the lone cartridge.

Planning to shoot outlaws was like trailing a grizzly—fine sport until the tracks got too fresh. He wished now he hadn't picked up the cartridge. He wished he could throw his gun away without the two outlaws noticing. But he couldn't. They were right behind him. The skinny man was impatient with old Brownie's gait; he wanted to go faster.

The fat man had acquired a fatalistic calm. "There's no hurry," he said. "You noticed how slow that posse was ridin'. Their horses are as blowed as ours. If we're on the right trail, we have a long climb ahead of us yet."

The canyon walls became higher.

The fat man spoke softly, "You sure

this is the right way over the hump, pop?"

"Sure I am." He hoped his voice sounded casual. Actually he had never before ridden so far up this canyon. But he knew this was the way over the hump—it had to be! It stood to reason, didn't it? The stream of water beside him came from somewhere high up in the hills, didn't it?

But suppose you couldn't follow it. Suppose there was no trail. Suppose—as so many folks claimed—there never had been a secret trail to Cass Town. He was shaking again. Fear was a tightening band, squeezing into his vitals.

Abruptly the canyon walls swept back and the canyon terminated in a bowl-like valley which was maybe two hundred yards in diameter. The outlaws stared up at the sheer, circling rimrock.

The fat man looked at Uncle John. "Well?" he said.

Uncle John pointed desperately to the moon-glazed ribbon of water that wandered across the bowl floor. "We—we foller that, boys."

The water came from behind a screening clump of four tall pines growing at the far side of the bowl. When the three riders were past the trees they saw the water falling from a notch fifty feet overhead. They halted. They had to halt; they were facing a solid wall of rock.

Uncle John drew a shuddering breath. "Now look, boys, I didn't mean to—I thought—I thought—"

The skinny man gave a barking laugh. "I told you! Didn't I tell you? Now what do we do? Climb?"

"It's still a chance," said the fat man. He dismounted. He put a hand on Uncle John's knee. "Get down, pop."

"Now please, boys. I didn't know—"

The fat man dragged him from the saddle; held him by the throat.

The skinny man had dismounted. Already he was climbing the rock wall.

Over his shoulder he said, "You better fix him good."

"He won't holler," said the fat man. "I'll fix him." His voice was flat. His expression was remotely thoughtful. He dug his fingers deeply and deliberately into Uncle John's throat.

Uncle John's old body writhed and jerked. He was choking; he was being murdered! He flailed at the fat man's face, kicked at his shins. His wildly beating palm came in contact with the gun in his waistband. He pressed the gun to the fat man's belly and pulled the trigger.

The fat man glanced down. He knew the gun was empty. He drew his own gun and raised it to swing it against Uncle John's head.

Uncle John kept pulling the trigger. Somewhere in his gun was a loaded chamber. The gun went off, muffled against the fat man's belly. It sounded like a firecracker under a blanket.

The fat man jarred backward, dropped his gun and then fell forward.

Air rushed into Uncle John's gagging, burning throat. He struggled out from under the fat man's limp weight. His lungs filled and emptied in a high-pitched yelling. Help! Help! Hampy! Help!

"Damnation!" cried the skinny man. He was halfway up the rock face. He pivoted—standing on one foot and clinging with one hand—and whipped out his gun. Suddenly he slipped; he came down sprawling and scrambling. He landed on his hands and knees.

Uncle John grabbed up the fat man's gun and backed away. "Don't move!" he squalled. "I got you cov—"

The skinny man moved. He tried to bring his gun around.

Uncle John fired. He shot as fast as he could—and the echoes rattled and the skinny man stopped moving.

Uncle John continued to back away. He backed away until he saw Hampy

Crew and his posse spilling toward him from the canyon opening, and then he sat weakly down and shut his eyes . . .

Someone was kneeling beside him. "You all right, Uncle John?"

He opened his eyes. "Tom!" he gasped. "It ain't you! I—I—" He couldn't believe it—Tom was alive! "Tom, I thought you was dead! The skinny feller said he killed you."

"No," said Tom. "He missed me. When you hollered, I ducked. He must've told you that just to scare you."

The posse was coming out from behind the clump of trees; they had the two outlaws loaded across their own saddles like sacks of grain. All at once Uncle John felt good. He'd never felt better. He cackled thinly. "Scare me!" he cried. "An old-timer like me?" He tapped Tom on the knee. "You know what I done, Tom? I told 'em that old yarn about Rustler's Trail and led 'em in here. I done it on purpose. I showed 'em how scared I was! Didn't I, Tom?"

"Yes," said Tom soberly. "You sure showed 'em, Uncle John."

Hampy Crew came up, leading old Brownie. The posse trailed after him. "Is he all right?" Hampy asked anxiously.

"Sure I'm all right." He stood erect and swayed slightly. "Just hungry—that's all. I ain't et." He climbed into the saddle.

Hampy Crew handed him Brownie's reins. There was a solemn deference in the sheriff's manner, proper tribute from one fighting man to another.

He held the reins high and gazed proudly about him. He was an old man who sometimes mixed fact and fancy, an old man who finally had achieved that most human of goals—importance in the eyes of his fellow men. "Boys," he said, "I know these hills better'n anyone—I'll get you home in jig time. You just foller me."

They followed him..

TALES of the

by LEE

MEDALS for ALL

NEVER DID BETTER LUCK—AND WORSE—HAPPEN TO MEN Faced WITH MORE IMPOSSIBLE ODDS. IT CAME ABOUT THIS WAY.

THE INDIANS WERE ON THE WARPATH IN TEXAS IN THE FALL OF '74. GEN. NELSON, A MILES, SENT TO QUELL THE UPRISING, WAS CAMPED AT McCLELLAN CREEK, ANXIOUSLY AWAITING REINFORCEMENTS AND SUPPLIES THAT DID NOT COME. "YOU'VE GOT TO GET A MESSAGE THROUGH TO FORT SUPPLY," HE TOLD VETERAN SCOUTS AMOS CHAPMAN AND BILLY DIXON.



THE SCOUTS, WITH CAVALRY SGT. Z. T. WOODALL AND PVTS. JOHN HARRINGTON, GEORGE SMITH AND PETER ROTH, RODE OUT ON THE DANGEROUS MISSION AT SUNSET ON SEPT. 10TH. ALL NIGHT THEY THREADED THEIR WAY THROUGH STRAY WAR PARTIES AND ENCAMPMENTS, HOLING UP AT DAWN ON A WOODED HILLOCK.



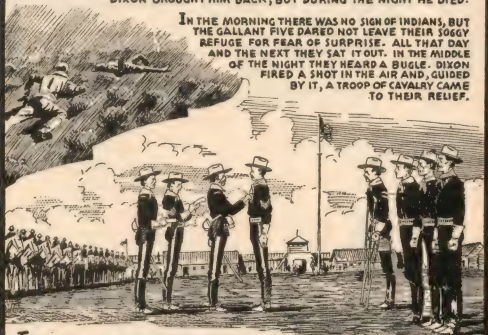
AT DARK THEY SET OUT AGAIN, AND AT SUNRISE WERE APPROACHING THE WASHITA RIVER. TOPPING A RIDGE, THEY RAN HEAD-ON INTO A WAR PARTY OF 125 COMANCHES. DISMOUNTING, THEY FORMED A RING AROUND SMITH, DETAILED HIM TO HOLD THEIR TRAVEL-WEARY HORSES, AND PREPARED TO MAKE A STAND. ON THE FIRST CHARGE, SMITH FELL AND THE HORSES STAMPEDED.

— OLD WEST



THE INDIANS ALTERNATELY CIRCLED AND CHARGED. EACH TIME, THE FIVE, HUSBANDING THEIR AMMUNITION, BEAT THEM OFF. ALL WERE WOUNDED, CHAPMAN'S KNEE BEING SHATTERED BY A BALL. WHEN THE HOSTILES DREW OFF MOMENTARILY, THEY DRAGGED THEMSELVES TO A BUFFALO WALLOW AND DUG IN WITH THEIR KNIVES. THEY WERE IN A BAD WAY, WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER, BUT THEY STUBBORNLY BEAT OFF CHARGE AFTER CHARGE.

IN MID-AFTERNOON A MIRACLE HAPPENED — RAIN SUDDENLY CAME DOWN IN CHILL TORRENTS. THEIR BESIEGERS WITHDREW OUT OF RANGE AND, HUDDLING IN THEIR BLANKETS, WAITED. IN THE LIGHTNING FLASHES, ROTH CRAWLED OUT TO RETRIEVE SMITH'S PRECIOUS AMMUNITION — AND FOUND HIM STILL ALIVE. ROTH AND DIXON BROUGHT HIM BACK, BUT DURING THE NIGHT HE DIED.



IN THE MORNING THERE WAS NO SIGN OF INDIANS, BUT THE GALLANT FIVE DARED NOT LEAVE THEIR SOGGY REFUGE FOR FEAR OF SURPRISE. ALL THAT DAY AND THE NEXT THEY SAT IT OUT. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT THEY HEARD A BUGLE. DIXON FIRED A SHOT IN THE AIR AND, GUIDED BY IT, A TROOP OF CAVALRY CAME TO THEIR RELIEF.

FIVE MEN SURVIVED, THOUGH CHAPMAN LOST HIS LEG, AND FOR THEIR GALLANT STAND THEY WERE AWARDED THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR, HIGHEST AWARD A SOLDIER CAN WIN.



*"You can buy land for money,
mister—but the price of a man
is lead!"*

BULLET IN WAITING

By **CLARK GRAY**

RUSSELL happened to be standing in the window when J. D. Mills pulled into town. He saw J. D. Mills dismount before the Texan hitchrail and cross the boardwalk to the batwings. J. D. Mills had on a brand new buff Stetson, and there was the usual air of swaggering superiority in the man.

Russell turned away from the window to grin at young Ned Foster.

"There goes Mills into the saloon. He'll be over in a few minutes to give me another working over."

Ned Foster, who rented the other half of the office, laid aside his lawbook.

"Mills is a bad apple, Tom. He won't give up just because bribery doesn't work."

Tom Russell nodded. The same idea had occurred to him. He turned back to the window, a gaunt, distinguished man who wore his business clothes well. Russell had a touch of gray at the temples. His face was marked by overwork, though he was only thirty five.

Across the street, J. D. Mills came out of the Texan, wiping his mouth with a white handkerchief.

Russell said, "Here he comes now, damn him."

He turned, hearing young Ned Foster scrape to his feet. Russell said quickly:

"You don't have to leave, Ned. There's nothing private about my business."

Foster grinned. "For all the clients I've had I might as well use a street corner. I won't be far off, Tom, in case you need a witness or something."

Foster left the office, and Russell heard his quick footsteps descending the creaking stairway. Russell did not move from his place at the window. He'd been standing there almost an hour, looking over the town where he had lived six months and which he was soon to leave. The town was just another panhandle cowtown, with its saloon, its few scattered stores, its bank and its sleepy, sandy street. Russell was a city man; he'd been surprised to find a kind of peace and contentment here. Part of that was due to Nancy Samuels, Russell thought. He smiled, then broke off the smile at the sound of J. D. Mills' footsteps on the stairway. Russell swung toward his desk as Mills entered the office.

Russell said, "Hello, Mills. Have a seat. What's on your mind?"

J. D. Mills wore sweeping mustaches to conceal the extreme youthfulness of his round face. Mills was conceited as a peacock; it was this that made him troublesome. Mills took the seat Russell

offered and said importantly, "What's on my mind? Murder, Russell."

"Oh?" Russell was vaguely surprised. "Somebody been murdered?"

J. D. Mills shook his head. "Not yet. Somebody might be. I've offered you a double price on those five sections, Russell. You want to take it?"

The vanity of the man irritated Russell more than the implied threat. He said curtly, "If that's all you came for you might as well leave now. I've told you the railroad isn't auctioning this land. You and Charley Price will have to get together and decide how you want to split those five sections. As an officer of the railroad, I have the authority to sell off this land in what I deem the best interests of local landowners. Now you and Price both want to buy those five sections. Since I can't sell to both, it's my decision that you'll have to split it on a basis satisfactory to both of you. And I will not be influenced by threats, Mills. Is that clear? Or do you want me to draw a picture?"

Mills' heavy face stained a dull red. "It's clear. But you're forgetting one thing, Russell. All them high and mighty ideas won't do you no good if you're found dead in a gutter some morning."

Russell said very quietly, "Mills, do you mean that? Would you actually kill me if I sold five sections to Price?"

"Yeah. Or have it done. My old man was a wide-looper. He had a few notches on his gun. I ain't scared to do what he done. Maybe you don't realize the panhandle is tough country, Russell."

"You're a damned vain fool, Mills. Don't you know I'll tell this to the sheriff soon as you leave town?"

"So what?" Mills shrugged. "It's your word against mine that I ever said it. And they'll never prove I killed you. Even if they do, that won't do you any good. Russell, do you want to die?"

Frowning, Russell pulled out his Phi

Beta Kappa key, which rested in his vest pocket at the end of his watch chain. He twirled the key, but he was scarcely aware of the action. This was so unbelievable, the reality of it escaped him. He simply could not grasp the fact that his life was threatened. But suddenly he had no doubt Mills was in earnest. Mills was a fool, of course, but a fool could pull a trigger. And probably Mills stood a good chance of getting away with murder. Russell smiled grimly, although there was no humor in him. He moved to his desk, and as he dropped into the swivel chair the decision clicked into being inside his brain, and he knew what he was going to do.

Russell drew the block map out of his desk drawer. He glanced at it and said quietly, "The sections you want are thirteen, fifteen, seventeen, nineteen and twenty-one. Right?"

J. D. Mills grinned. "Hell, I don't know which sections I mean, Russell."

Russell nodded. He studied the map, which looked like a large checkerboard, with each block representing a square mile, or section. All the white blocks on the checkerboard belonged to the railroad, payment from Texas for the building of a track through this country twenty years before. The black squares were school lands. They had been purchased at homestead by the cattlemen and farmers of the county, the purchase money going toward the schools of Texas. It was the checkerboard arrangement of the map that had created trouble; each cattleman who owned school lands wanted to purchase adjoining railroad lands to block up his holdings. Most of the disputes had been settled amicably, because he, Russell, had insisted on fairness when he'd come here six months ago to sell off the railroad lands. Only J. D. Mills had stubbornly demanded more than his share. Russell said slowly, "Yes, those are the sections. Mills, I am going to sell those sections to Price. You can go

straight to hell. Now get out of my office. Our business is finished, for good."

RUSSELL was pretty sure his business with J. D. Mills wasn't finished. As Ned Foster had said, Mills was a bad apple. Russell stood in the office window, turning Mills' parting retort in his mind. Mills had said, "I'll give you a couple of days to think it over. Dying ain't easy, Russell. And you're a long time dead."

Yes, Russell thought, *a man is a long time dead*. But while still alive, a man had to do the best he could. On the street below him, Russell saw young Ned Foster talking to a couple of wheat farmers. Russell had a sudden urge to tell Foster of this; he liked the cheerful young lawyer. But because Foster seemed busy, Russell left the office and turned upstreet toward Nancy Samuels' millinery shop.

Nancy was alone in her store. She came from behind a counter piled with silly looking hats, a tall, cool girl whom Russell had always pictured as a Norse goddess. But there was nothing goddess-like in the quick kiss she gave him. Then she leaned back in his arms, smiling, and instantly she sensed the trouble in him. She said, "Tom, you look scared."

Russell told her. Not because he wanted sympathy or confirmation of his judgment. Russell made up his own mind about business affairs. He told Nancy because she had a right to know. Russell said, "Mills is a fool, Nancy. But it could be he might try it. I don't know. Maybe I ought to carry a gun."

"Tom, why don't you sell to Mills? I don't want to lose my husband before I even marry him."

Russell stared, surprised by her clutch at his arm more than her words. He'd thought that this was shock, or hatred of J. D. Mills.

"Don't worry about it, sweetheart. Probably Mills won't try anything. Why

don't you close up shop and we'll have supper at the hotel?"

"No, Tom. Please listen to me. I went to school with J. D. I know him. He's—he's the kind that won't stop once he makes up his mind to something. He's got a streak of something in him, Tom—I don't know what. Sell him the land, and then we can go to Austin and be married. Tom—"

She came again into his arms. Russell soothed her, touched with pride, and yet at the same time puzzled. Nancy had never been like this before. She had been aloof, unreachable. It was her aloofness that had first attracted him. He had thought of her as his wife in Austin, presiding at his table, with her cool courtesy, a final beautiful proof of his own importance as vice president of one of the country's most important railroads.

Gently Russell pushed her from him. "Nancy, this will be over in a few days, then we'll go to Austin. I shouldn't have mentioned Mills to you. Come on. Dry your eyes and let's eat supper."

Nancy continued to puzzle him during supper. Russell got the impression Nancy was studying him secretly, as if something he'd done had surprised her. Russell didn't like it. After supper, he deposited Nancy at her little house at the edge of town. Returning to his room at the hotel, he found Ned Foster waiting for him.

The young lawyer wore a worried frown. "Tom," he said, "I talked to a couple of J. D. Mills' neighbors. Mills has imported a gunman."

Tom Russell sat down wearily on the bed. He began to unlace his shoes, and it came to him that maybe he was a fool to get his back up at J. D. Mills. Nothing prevented his selling the five sections to Mills. Nothing except his own sense of right and wrong. Russell sighed.

"What do you know, Ned? Mills threatens to kill me if I don't sell to him.

What do you make of that situation?"

Foster showed no surprise. "I guessed that. What did you tell him, Tom?"

"To go to hell. Told him I was going to sell to Charley Price."

"Uh-huh." Ned Foster nodded. "I guessed that, too. Tom, I'm going out and buy you a gun."

"All right, Ned." Russell said wearily. "I guess maybe I'll need it."

Young Foster returned fifteen minutes later with a paper package which, when unwrapped, proved to be a shiny Colt .45 with holster and gunbelt. Russell had his shoes off by this time. He stood in his stocking feet and strapped on the gunbelt, feeling foolish. He hefted the weight of the .45. He executed a practice draw, clumsily, while Ned Foster watched with a frown.

Ned said, "Let out the belt another notch. You want the holster lower on your hip."

Russell swore feelingly, "Ned, isn't there any honorable way out of this damned mess? I don't want to shoot it out with Mills, blast it!"

"I know." Ned Foster was very serious. "You could tell the sheriff about Mills' threat, of course. He'd laugh at you. Tell you Mills' bark was worse than his bite. The sheriff used to break horses for Mills' daddy, twenty years ago."

"Then what the hell am I going to do, Ned?"

"You could leave the county. Or sell to Mills."

"I won't do that," Russell said grimly.

Ned Foster nodded. "I didn't think so. Let out the belt a notch, Tom."

Russell went to bed at midnight; from midnight till seven he dreamed of drawing a gun. He drew it so it snagged on the holster. He drew it too fast and let it twist out of his hands. He drew it and fumbled helplessly trying to ear back the hammer. At seven he quit drawing it and dragged red-eyed out of bed. By

eight he had finished breakfast, visited his office, and was riding a rented horse out of town toward Charley Price's ranch. He wore the new gun on his hip.

CHARLEY PRICE'S ranch lay about three miles north of J. D. Mills', with the disputed sections running east and west between the two. Price and his younger sister ran the place single-handed. It was a shoestring outfit, compared to J. D. Mills' thousand-head layout. Russell pulled up at the picket fence surrounding the neat white house. The haybarn, Russell saw, was fairly small, indicating that Charley Price ran fewer than a hundred head. Russell thought, *if anybody needs those five sections, it's Charley Price.*

Charley Price was a weathered, gray-ing little man of forty. He invited Russell inside cordially. Belle, Price's sister, had a pot of coffee on the back of the stove and a batch of fresh doughnuts draining on a brown paper sack on the table. Before Russell quite knew what was happening, he had his feet under the table, and he was drinking coffee and eating hot sugared doughnuts. And enjoying it. Belle Price said, "You don't get out often, Mr. Russell. We hoped we could show you something of our ranching operations before you left for Austin."

Russell studied this girl, unconsciously comparing her to Nancy Samuels. Belle was not as pretty, no question about it. Or rather, Russell amended, Belle was pretty in a different way. Flushed now with the heat of her doughnut cooking, she was small and dimpled and she had a spot of flour on her round elbow. She was, Russell thought, the type of woman who had settled this country and made homes of soddies and log cabins. She was a pioneer. Nancy Samuels, on the other hand, was a city woman, and at this moment sitting in this comfortable kitchen, Russell had his first doubt that he wanted

a city woman. He said, "I've been busy, Miss Belle. And it's a long ride out. I came out today to see if you two still want to buy those five sections south of here."

"If we want to?" Charley Price leaned forward eagerly, setting his coffee cup in its saucer with a little crash. "You bet we do. But I thought you'd—" Price broke off.

"You thought J. D. Mills would outbid you? The railroad doesn't operate that way, Charley. The land sells for four dollars an acre, straight across. I've decided to sell it to you."

Russell hesitated, wondering whether he should tell them of J. D. Mills' threat. Then he thought grimly that they had some right to the knowledge. Besides, the more people who knew of the threat, the harder it would be for Mills to escape the consequences of his murder—if it came to that. Russell grinned wryly and told them.

Charley Price was not as surprised as Russell had supposed. Price said, "I've always known Mills was a bad one. I heard he brought in a gunnie from over in Lincoln County. Mr. Russell, I'll have to see the bank before I can pay you for them five sections. We'd better git right back to town, so we can close the deal and you can head back to Austin."

"Tomorrow is soon enough," Russell said, responding to some stubbornness in him. "Mills isn't going to run me out of the county, Charley. When I leave, I'll be ready to leave."

Russell got his hat presently and walked through the front of the house. He had not missed Belle Price, but how he was astonished to hear her in a side room that evidently was a bedroom. The door was closed. Through the thin wood Russell very plainly heard the sound of Belle Price sobbing, and it came to him in a kind of wonder that Belle was crying for him. Not because he, Russell, meant anything to her. But because she thought he

was going to be killed by the hired gun.

Russell rode back to town very thoughtfully. It was a time for examining himself. Russell thought about the years of his boyhood, pinched with poverty. His slow climb through law school, working nights as a stablehand. His wild happiness when he graduated and secured a position on the railroad's legal staff. There had been more work after that, nothing but work. It seemed to Russell now that he had missed something, something typified by the peace and quiet comfort of Charley Price's kitchen, smelling of doughnuts. Russell decided that if he was going to find what he had missed, he couldn't afford to die just yet.

In town, Russell stabled his horse. He was crossing the street toward the hotel when a prickling sensation at the back of his neck caused him to turn. He nearly stumbled in surprise at what he saw.

In front of Nancy Samuels' millinery shop stood J. D. Mills. Nancy was beside Mills, her cool, tall figure turned toward him. Both were watching Russell.

Russell had his moment of sickening suspicion, then he cursed quietly to himself for being a fool. Nancy's shop was a public place. Mills had a right to be there. Russell lifted his hat to Nancy and moved on toward the hotel.

Inside the shaded lobby, Ned Foster unfolded his long legs from an easy chair and crossed toward him. Foster said quietly, "Where the hell you been, Tom? Another hour and I'd have begun beating the brush."

Russell smiled wearily. "Out to Price's. I'll be all right, Ned. Don't let me keep you from your business."

"I could put my business in my hat. Listen, Tom. I went to see the sheriff for you. He laughed. Told me Mills was just playful like his old man." Foster grunted. "His old man just playfully shot a drunk on Main Street, fifteen years ago."

Russell grinned. "They convict him?"

"Never even tried him. Claimed self defense. Maybe J. D.'ll work that one on you. Tom, I'm staying with you till you leave the county, hear me?"

Russell nodded. "Thanks, Ned. Maybe it'd help. But let's see. This is Wednesday, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"I always have supper at Nancy's on Wednesdays." Russell smiled. "You want to come along?"

"Not to Nancy's." Foster wrinkled his nose. "I got a hunch she doesn't think much of me. Besides, I reckon you'll be safe there. But you stop at my room first thing in the morning. From breakfast on, I'm your shadow."

Russell bathed and shaved and changed into a fresh suit. When he emerged from the hotel, dusk had folded over the town. Russell paced quietly upstreet, feeling his liking return for this sleepy place that was so unlike the jangling cities he knew. He was smiling when he knocked on Nancy's door.

Nancy admitted him. Passing through the front door, Russell noted that the lights in the front room had been extinguished. This surprised him, and he was turning to ask Nancy about it when a sledge hammer weight exploded at the back of his head. Numbness spread through Russell; he was powerless to move. Yet his mind, startlingly active, told him Nancy had betrayed him. Then Russell was on the carpet, smelling the faint smell of dust, and numbness blotted out his amazement.

RUSSELL awoke once to a jolting that told him he was being carried somewhere. He sat up, with pain lancing through his head, and looked around. He had just time to see he was on a wagon, just time to recognize the road that led to J. D. Mills' ranch, then the thing that had hit him before struck

again. Falling, Russell heard a voice say, "Not too damned hard. We don't want to kill him yet." Then he slept.

He awoke the second time on a pile of corn. The corn had been husked, but not shelled; the hard ears gouged Russell painfully where he lay. Before him, a lantern burned. Two men and a woman sat at a table. Russell sat up. He asked, "What is this? A granary?"

J. D. Mills said, "That's right, Russell. We keep hog feed here. How you feel?"

"Rotten." Russell passed a hand across the matted blood at the back of his head. The movement made him wince with pain. He lay back on the piled corn and stared heavily at Nancy Samuels.

"I never would have thought it of you, Nancy. I thought of a lot of ways J. D. could get to me, but never you."

Nancy Samuels had the grace to blush. She said in a queer, choked voice, "They—they broke into my house and made me let you in. Tom, I didn't do what you're thinking."

Russell said, "Uh-huh. I believe you, Nancy. About like I'd believe a coyote if he could talk. All right, Mills. What comes next?"

J. D. Mills got to his feet. "It still ain't too late for you, Russell. I've got a pen and one of your blank deeds you was carryin' in your pocket. Make out the deed to them five sections, and you can leave the county. With Nancy."

Russell said to Nancy, "You'd go with me, Nancy? To Austin? To be married?"

"Yes, Tom. Oh, Tom, will you? Darling, let's get away from this—this horrible place. Yes, Tom, sweetheart. I'll go anywhere with you."

Russell said quietly, "All right. I'll have to sit in a chair at the table. I don't think I'd be much good at standing right now."

The second man, who had not spoken or moved up to now, came out of his chair. This man was the paid gunnie from Lin-

coln County, Russell thought. A dark-faced, completely silent man. Russell got to his feet and staggered to the empty chair.

J. D. Mills put the pen in his hand and unfolded the printed form of the blank deed. Russell got out his handkerchief and rubbed his forehead a moment, trying to ease the pain. Then he wrote.

He filled in the blanks carefully, his own name as representative of the railroad, which was party of the first part. J. D. Mills' full name, which, when he asked, turned out to be John Daniel. Then the section numbers twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen and twenty. Russell moved the lantern slightly, sighing wearily. He said, "Here it is, Mills. It'll have to be notarized, but maybe you can fix that."

Nancy Samuels said, "I'm going outside. I don't want to see it."

Russell asked quietly, "Don't want to see what, Nancy?"

"She doesn't want to see you get it, Mister." This was the paid gunman. "Go on, Miss. I'll wait."

Russell said, "So you did trick me, Nancy? So you really did?"

Russell felt no pain now. No pain at all. And this was strange, he thought. He'd believed he loved Nancy Samuels, and now, when he had lost her in the most degrading way a man can lose a woman, he felt no pain.

"Sure she did," J. D. Mills grinned. "Nancy and me are getting married. She was bait, sucker. And you fell for it."

Russell said, "I see," and waited quietly at the table until Nancy Samuels, white-faced, had left the granary, shutting the door tightly. The room had no windows. With the door shut, little sound would come through to the outside world. Russell said, "It won't do you any good to kill me yet, Mills. I listed the wrong sections on that deed. I listed school lands, which you already own."

Mills said, "What! Why you crazy—"

Mills unfolded the paper, still unbelieving.

Russell said, "School lands in this county are even-numbered sections. Railroad lands are odd-numbered. Check it up, if you—"

Russell kicked the table, and at the same time made a grab for the lantern. The table skidded into Mills, upsetting him. Russell hooked the chair from under himself with his left hand, flung it in the general direction of the Lincoln County gunman.

The chair struck the gunman on the shoulder, spoiling his aim. The gunman's shot screamed past Russell's head.

Russell had the lantern in his right hand. The lantern's base held two quarts of coal oil; it was full now, making a heavy enough weapon. Russell charged.

He went first for the gunman, who was the more dangerous of the two. The gunman was disentangling himself from the chair, trying to bring a wobbly gun to aim. Russell swung the lantern at the man's forearm, heard the bone crack. The gun dropped to the floor.

Russell didn't stop. He went plunging for J. D. Mills, who was on the floor, frantically trying to pull his gun from under his own body.

A shot nicked Russell's ear and he spun to see the Lincoln County gunman shooting at him left-handed. Russell flung his lantern. A strange thing happened, then. The lantern was a good lantern, made to stay lit in storms. It had stayed lit, but the heavy blows had cracked its kerosene-filled base. While the lantern was in mid-air, Russell saw the spilled kerosene on the base somehow catch fire. And then the lantern landed in the Lincoln County gunman's midriff. Instantly the man's shirt was a mass of fire.

Russell staggered to the door, knowing he had won now; having no thought now but to save these two before the fire trapped them. He kicked open the door and shouted, "Fire!" Ned Foster ran to

him, followed by the sheriff and two or three townsmen. Ned shouted, "You all right, Tom? I saw Nancy's house was dark. I had the devil's own time getting that fat sheriff 'out here. You okay? Damnit, say something. You okay?"

Russell grinned foolishly. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder, toward the granary, where the gunman was beginning to scream. Then he sank quietly to his knees.

SOMEBODY forced a slug of whisky between his lips. Somebody else washed his head. And then he was leaning against J. D. Mills' bunkhouse, and New Foster was saying something.

"So Nancy blabbed it all out like a schoolgirl," Foster was saying. "She got in too rough a crowd when she played with Mills and his hired gunhand. She's scared stiff now."

Russell said, "I never got to use my gun, Ned. All that practicing, gone to waste."

"You didn't need it," Foster said. "Man, how you must have fought, Tom! Mills is dead with a squashed head, and that gunnie won't be playing bad boy for a year, if ever."

Russell said, "I was fighting for doughnuts, Ned."

"Doughnuts? Look, Tom, we better get you in town to the doc! That crack on the head—"

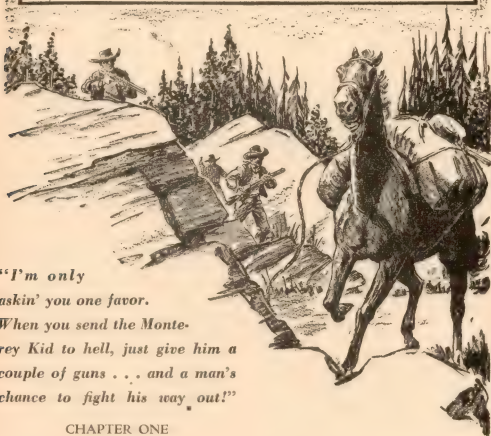
Russell held up his hand. "I'm all right. Ned, do you like doughnuts?"

"Sure. I like 'em. But—"

"I like 'em, too," Russell said. "Ned, I don't think I'll go back to Austin. I'm a lawyer, you know. You need a partner, and I need. . . . Ned, Charley Price's sister, Belle, makes the best doughnuts I ever ate. You reckon she'd bring me some, while I'm laid up with this head?"

Ned Foster said, "Oh! I get it." He grinned. "Yeah, Tom. I believe she would."

THE MARK OF THE MONTEREY KID



*"I'm only
askin' you one favor.
When you send the Monte-
rey Kid to hell, just give him a
couple of guns . . . and a man's
chance to fight his way out!"*

CHAPTER ONE

Dead or Alive

IN THE Sierra that year the fall rains came early and with stormy suddenness, washing out roads and trails, deluging camps, filling the flumes with silt. The rivers already ran muddy, from hydraulic mining, but those first violent rains made them worse. That was the year of new strikes on the Yuba, the Stanislaus, the North Fork of the Ameri-

can. It was the year discouraged men got new hope. And it was also the year that the Dade brothers, coming down from the mountains in defeat and disillusionment, recognized a certain bearded man and decided to change their fortune.

These Dade brothers, on a certain day in the fall, with thunder crashing through the mountains, hiked into Indian Bluff

Copyright 1941 by Fictioneers, Inc., a subsidiary of
Popular Publications, Inc.

A Novel By
**JOHN K.
BUTLER**

A bullet struck the mare
and she went down, pin-
ning the Kid. . . .

leading a lame mule. It was just the middle of the day, but the angry black clouds made it seem like evening. The pines tossed and waved in the wind before

driving gusts of rain, and the road through Indian Bluff was a series of rippling mud puddles.

The Dades led their mules into the shed

behind Ed Thorne's store, removed the packs, and got down feed from the loft. Then they went inside the store.

It was fine in there, warm. The lamp was lit; the pot-belly stove glowed deep crimson; all the packing cases, the sacks of flour, salt, feed; the shelves burdened with supplies, and hams hanging from the rafters; a smell of tobacco, coffee, dried apples, leather; a feeling of plenty, of comfort, while the rain lashed at the windows and the wind howled around the outside corners.

Ed Thorne and another man sat by the stove, warming their boots on the rail. The man had a banjo on his lap; he was strumming it and singing Spanish songs in a pleasant, soft voice, but he stopped as soon as the Dades came in.

"Hello, boys," Ed Thorne greeted. Then he recognized them and added, "Hello, Theodore. Hello, Lawrence."

"Hello, Ed," said the Dades.

They removed their slickers, shook rain off them, draped them over barrels. Ed Thorne brought a couple of wooden chairs, ones he'd built himself, over to the stove.

"Better draw up and dry yourselves out, boys. Some storm, eh?"

"It's early this year," said Theodore Dade.

"Too early," said Lawrence.

They produced smoking tobacco, offering some to Ed Thorne and some to the banjo man. The stranger thanked them but didn't take any. He was busy tuning his banjo, fingering the strings, and most of the time he kept his face averted. He was a young man—you could tell that even through his whiskers. You could tell it by his eyes, by his hands. His hands didn't look like they'd done much work with pick and shovel, but they weren't weak hands, either.

"You boys going in or coming out?" Ed Thorne asked.

"Coming out," said Theodore Dade.

"No luck, eh?"

"Not this time. Not even a nibble!"

"It's them damned hydraulic operations," said Ed Thorne. "Them big companies freezing out the small prospector and getting all the gold. There ought to be a law against it." He cocked an eyebrow. "You boys aim to go back again?"

"If we can get a stake," Lawrence said.

"We'll get one," his brother added confidently. "We're headed down to Auburn. Got a cousin there. Runs a hotel. He staked us once before. Maybe he'll stake us again."

"Well," announced Ed Thorne, "I sure hope you boys get the stake. I got a lot of confidence in you boys, and I think you'll strike it." He failed to add that his confidence fell short of inspiring him to stake them himself.

"We'll strike it yet," Theodore said, and he eyed the banjo man curiously. *Fellow must be part Spanish, he thought. You can tell them when they're part Spanish. A young fellow, too, not over thirty. Can't be a prospector. Maybe he belongs to one of them hydraulic mine companies. Got a revolver stuffed in his belt; you can just see the butt of it under his jacket. Well, it's all right for a fellow to have a revolver, but why the hell does he keep it there when he's just a-setting at the stove in Ed Thorne's store? Must be damned uncomfortable to have a revolver pressed against your belly.*

Theodore Dade thought all that and then asked the banjo man, "You going in, or coming out?"

"Out," said the banjo man.

"Sacramento?"

"*Quien sabe?*"

"San Francisco?"

The banjo man shrugged, his dark, amused eyes on the banjo as he strummed it gently, making nice music.

He don't talk much, Theodore Dade thought. One of them silent fellows. Funny Ed Thorne don't introduce him to us. Maybe Ed don't know who he is.

Theodore studied the lean, bearded face as he saw it in profile, and then sharp recognition came to him. Theodore's face flushed; his spine got prickles in it; his belly gnawed as if with sudden, overwhelming hunger. He could feel a cold sweat coming over him and he tried not to look at the banjo man.

"Well," he said nervously to Ed Thorne, "it—it sure is early for these here storms."

Rain lashed against the glass, pawed at the roof with countless thousands of watery fingers. The wind howled and moaned through the pines.

"Yes," Ed Thorne agreed. "It's early this year."

Theodore Dade got up from the chair. His legs felt weak. He had a sneaking feeling that maybe the banjo man could read his thoughts.

But the banjo man was just sitting there, strumming the banjo, humming soft songs in Spanish.

"Come on, Lawrence," said the elder Dade. "We got to see about the mule. About that there lame leg."

THE DADES went outside to the shed where they had left the mule. The rain sounded hard and heavy now, battering the roof of the shed. The wind was icy cold.

Theodore Dade clutched the arm of his brother and said, "Listen! You know who that fellow is?"

Over the sound of wind and rain they could hear the brisk strumming of the banjo, the voice now singing boldly.

"You mean the fellow in there with Ed?"

"Of course. Who the hell else would I mean? Listen, that fellow is the Monterey Kid!"

Lawrence Dade mulled the statement over in his mind. He bit off a hunk of tobacco and chewed it. Finally, he said, "How do you know?"

Theodore waved a hand impatiently. "How do I know? I just know. I got thinking. And I got looking at him. He's not a prospector and he's part Spanish. He's got a revolver in his pants while he's just settin' there by the stove. And Ed don't know him, or Ed would introduce us. Ed thinks he's just some mountain man. But I know who it is. I can tell by his face. I can tell it even through that beard he's got."

Lawrence Dade worked his jaws over the tobacco, spit thoughtfully. "What do you aim to do about it, Theodore?"

"I aim to get him. Listen, the Wells Fargo Company offers a thousand dollars for him, dead or alive. The Citizens' Committee in Sacramento offers another thousand, dead or alive. You know what you and me could do with two thousand dollars?"

"We could get a stake."

"Sure. So we'll get him. We'll go right in there and get him."

Lawrence Dade chewed on his tobacco, then said, "He's killed seven men, Theodore. You and me, we never killed nobody in our lives. We ain't no match for him. We better go get the law in Indian Bluff."

Theodore Dade scoffed, "And split up the money with Old Man Blakely? Listen, you and me can get him ourselves. We don't need to get him alive. All we got to do is slip up behind him. That's easy. He's just sitting there, singing and playing that damned banjo. All we do is just pull the trigger."

"But suppose it ain't really the Monterey Kid?"

"But it is, I tell you! That's him. And this is our chance." Theodore Dade found a revolver in the packs of equipment they'd taken from the mule. It was an old Navy Colt, made over from a powder and ball gun, carried six cartridges. "I'll get him. Leave it to me. I'm not scared, either. Just leave it to me. Listen—"

When they returned to the store, Ed Thorne and the banjo man were still by the stove, their boots hooked up on the rail, toasting, giving off the smell of hot leather. The banjo man was playing and singing softly, and Ed Thorne joined in the song now and then, humming in a cracked, self-conscious voice. Ed was having a good time.

Lawrence Dade wandered around the store, pretending to examine things on the shelves, managing to smile now and then at the banjo man as though approving the music.

Theodore Dade strolled behind the counter, on the opposite side of the store, and stood behind the backs of the banjo man and Ed Thorne. He was more nervous now, not nearly as sure of himself as when he'd been outside in the shed talking it over with his brother. Slowly, cautiously, he drew the Navy Colt from under his jacket, the hammer already cocked. His breath came short and heavy. His hand shook as he lifted the Colt and tried to sight it on the back of the Monterey Kid.

He remembered then about the case down in Hangtown—a bartender tried to shoot the Monterey Kid in the back, only got him in the flesh of the neck, and the Kid turned around, drew his gun in a flash and shot the bartender between the eyes.

Then there was that other time they told about, on the Summit road, when the Kid held up the stage and the Wells Fargo guard shot him clean off his horse. But the Kid killed the guard with one shot, killed the driver with two, and crawled away through the brush so the posse couldn't find him.

Yet Theodore Dade told himself he wasn't scared. It was just that he'd never shot a man before, and he didn't want to shoot the Monterey Kid, even though the Kid was a skunk. No, that was one thing about the Dades. They were not

killers. They didn't even kill bandits.

THEODORE felt a lot better when he had come to that conclusion, when he had stowed the Navy Colt back in his pocket. Sweat dripped from his face, and he walked stiffly around the counter and sat down by the stove, trying to smile at the banjo man, at Ed Thorne, at his brother. Once he even broke self-consciously into song.

The banjo man eyed him again, in that brief, cynical way, as if something about the Dade brothers amused him.

"Well," said Theodore, "it's sure early for these rains this year."

The banjo man went on playing and singing.

Theodore finally nodded to his brother, and once more the Dades went outside into the shed.

Lawrence said, "Well, what was the matter?"

"I couldn't do it, Lawrence. I got to thinking that we Dades ain't killers. We can't shoot a man in the back. Not even a bandit like him. Not even for two thousand dollars."

Lawrence said shrewdly, "You weren't scared, were you?"

"Me?" Theodore gave a laugh intended to be scoffing. "You mean *me*? Listen, I'm not scared of a skunk like him. I could've shot him right in the back. But I wouldn't do it, because we Dades ain't cut out that way."

"You aim to meet him face to face?" Lawrence asked.

"Well, no. Why should I? I'm not no gunfighter like him. I'm just a prospector."

Lawrence chewed his tobacco and spit. "We could sure use that two thousand dollars."

"Sure. But I ain't through yet. Listen, this Monterey Kid is coming down from the mountains. I guess those were his two horses we seen under the pine shelter

across the road. Now listen. We don't know for sure which trail he'll take, but I have a guess he'll go down through Three Pines."

"Why Three Pines?"

"Because Sadie the Queen lives there, and Sadie's his sweetheart."

"Sadie," Lawrence Dade suggested, "is the sweetheart of all the men in the Sierra—as long as they got gold to spend."

"Sure, but she's also the special sweetheart of the Monterey Kid. She's his sweetheart even when he don't have gold. I'll bet my last dollar the Kid won't go down to the valley without slipping into Three Pines to see Sadie."

Lawrence looked skeptical. "You aim to shoot him in Three Pines?"

"Naw, I don't aim to shoot him at all. You and me go down to Three Pines and tell Short John Marshall that the Monterey Kid is coming. We tell Short John Marshall the Kid has now grown a beard, and how he's dressed, and what his horses look like. Short John will do the rest."

"How about the two thousand dollars?"

"That's what I'm getting at. Short John is an honest law enforcer. He'll capture the Kid, dead or alive, and we won't have to do nothing, and he'll see we get all the reward money for the information."

"That sounds good," Lawrence said. "I was scared of the Monterey Kid myself."

"Scared? I'm not scared." Theodore Dade frowned indignantly. "It's just that I don't want to kill nobody. We Dades ain't killers."

So the Dade brothers bought a few supplies in the store, said nervous good-bys to Ed Thorne and the banjo man, and left the same afternoon on the road to Three Pines, leading their lame mule, pushing fast through the rain.

When they left, the Monterey Kid was still by the stove in the store, strumming

the banjo, singing Spanish songs for the entertainment of Ed Thorne and to pass the time on that stormy afternoon.

DURING the night the storm broke, and at Indian Bluff in the dawn you could see clear cold sky with only scraps of clouds in it. The sun rose without warmth, and there was no breeze, the puddles in the road standing clear as mirrors, as if iced.

The Monterey Kid got up ahead of the sun, fed the two horses he'd left under the pine shelter across the road, and then he ate a big breakfast cooked by Ed Thorne's wife. He paid for the breakfast, for yesterday's meals, for his night's lodging, for the feed for the horses.

Ed Thorne was sorry to see him go.

Across the road, under the shelter, the Kid saddled his roan mare, fixed packs on the back of another mare. He rode out of Indian Bluff shortly after sun-up, leading the bay mare and humming softly to himself as he turned down the narrow road to Three Pines.

By late afternoon of that day the Monterey Kid had left Indian Bluff many long, mountainous miles behind him, but he rode without hurry. Sadie would be glad to see him, no matter whether he arrived by day or by night, today or tomorrow.

At about four in the afternoon, approaching Boulder Gap, a rock pass along the road, he heard a drumming of hooves coming fast behind him and he drew the horses over to the side of the road to let the stage go by.

The stage came along, clattering, creaking, rocking on its springs, the big steel-rimmed wheels sliding and slithering in the mud.

The Monterey Kid waved a hand to the driver, to the Wells Fargo guard. They returned the wave.

He said to himself, "Ah, you fools! I have held you up three times in one year, and now you go by without knowing me.

It is funny. I will hold you up three more times in the coming year, maybe even more often. And still you will wave to me as you pass me on the trail." He saluted to the vanishing stage coach. "Till we meet again. Yes. *Hasta la vista.*"

He rode slowly through Boulder Gap, leading the pack horse. He rode sitting carelessly side-saddle, both his boots dangling down over the roan's left side. He hummed little songs about Sadie, about all the stages he'd held up, the mines he'd robbed. He smiled as he sang, his white teeth gleaming in a dark bearded face.

A voice from nowhere called suddenly, "All right, Kid! There are fourteen of us and we got you covered! Put up your fists, Kid!"

The Monterey Kid made no quick move. His heart gave a startled thump, but he calmed himself and continued riding slowly through the pass. He looked up, still smiling from his last song, and saw a rifle glinting in the sun. He saw Short John Marshall behind the boulders above the road, glowering down at him over the rifle barrel.

"Hello, *Señor* Marshall," he greeted.

All through the pass, in the crevices, there were rifles. The Monterey Kid began to count them aloud. "*Uno, dos, tres, quatro. . .*"

Short John Marshall cried, "Fourteen of us, Kid! Put up your fists and slide off that there horse!"

The roan continued at the same slow walk, the pack mare following doggedly in the line tied to the saddle horn with a loose knot.

The Kid kept his smile, but his mouth twitched nervously. "Fourteen of you? Does it require so many?"

"Get off that horse!"

The Monterey Kid smiled in a lazy, unconcerned way at the fourteen rifles poking down at him from the boulders. "It is very complimentary," he said, and

then he acted in a series of motions so quick they might have been a single motion—jabbing spurs into the roan's side, yanking loose the rope tying the pack mare, pulling a revolver from his waistband, shooting. The roan lurched from a walk into a gallop, from gallop to dead run, hooves pounding up clouds of mud from the road.

All fourteen rifles cut loose at once.

The Kid had used the sudden forward lurch of the horse to swing himself around and straddle the saddle, backwards. He shot six times at the rifles, threw away his gun, drew another, shot six more times, and all the while he kicked spurs into the roan's flanks, riding backwards, crouching in perfect balance on the roan's back.

The sound of the gunfire cracked and echoed through the pass, and ricocheting bullets screeched off boulders, whistling and crying like ghosts in flight.

The Kid was shot in the right leg twice, the slugs biting through his thigh. Instantly more bullets struck him. He felt one smash his kneecap, another smash his ankle, his foot, shatter a shin bone—all on the right leg. They were shooting lower than they intended. Bullets jolted the roan mare; she stumbled. She picked herself up, stumbled again, and went down, the heavy weight of her on the Kid's left leg. He tried to drag himself away, holding an empty gun, his smile fierce and fighting. The horse rolled over and a hoof caught him on the side of the head. He flattened in the muddy trail, as though very tired, waiting sleep.

The rifles had stopped.

Short John Marshall climbed down from the boulders and walked across the road toward where the roan mare and the Monterey Kid lay.

Up in the boulders at each side of the road other men were coming down.

"All right, boys," said Short John Marshall. "We got him."

CHAPTER TWO

Partners With Death

FOR FIVE days the Monterey Kid lay on the jail cot without moving. Most of the time he slept. During the first two days he was so weak that even the effort of drinking a cup of soup would put him back to exhausted sleep. He had lost a lot of blood through his legs.

It was good that he slept, because, sleeping, he wasn't aware of his danger. He didn't know that during those first days a lynch mob had been crowded around the jail, never leaving it, and that Short John Marshall and two deputies had held them at bay with scatter guns.

On the third day the Kid became vaguely aware of where he was. They had brought him down to Three Pines. He was in jail that had two cells. The cell next to him was empty.

On the fourth day a man putting fresh bandages and splints on his legs turned out to be Doc Whitman, the local medico, and also the local undertaker.

The Kid asked, "How am I, Doc?"

"You'll live till you get to the scaffold," Doc Whitman said. "Your right leg is shattered in so many places it ought to be amputated. Your left leg is just broken where your horse fell on it. You'll get to the scaffold all right, but you won't be able to walk to it."

The Kid's lips formed a cynical smile. "Someone will be kind enough to assist me to the gallows?"

"Sure," said Doc Whitman. "Lots of people will be glad to help you."

On the fifth day, Short John Marshall came into the cell and stood by the Kid's bed. "How about it? You ready to go to Sacramento tomorrow?"

"Sacramento?"

"Yeah. They're waiting for you down there. Got a rope all stretched for you."

"It's very kind of them to wait," the Kid said bitterly. "I'm sorry I delayed them."

"They don't mind waiting. Not as long as the rope don't rot on the scaffold. Shall we go tomorrow?"

The Kid glanced down at his legs lying stiffly in splints. "I can't walk," he said. "Also, I can't ride. I'm afraid, *Señor* Marshall, that if you wish to take me to the gallows in Sacramento, you will have to take me in a wagon."

"Don't worry about transportation," Short John told him. "Leave all that to me."

On the evening of the fifth day the Kid sat up in his cot and read the Auburn Journal. It was the biggest and best newspaper in the Sierra, being four pages long. The Kid read it by lamplight in his cell, read the story of his capture.

He had been reported, the paper said, by the Dade brothers, Theodore and Lawrence. The Dades had recognized him, in spite of his bearded disguise, at Ed Thorne's general store, Indian Bluff. The Dades could have killed him on the spot, but they were not killers by nature, so they came down to Three Pines and reported to Short John Marshall. Short John, with thirteen sworn deputies, went out and caught the Monterey Kid as he rode through Boulder Gap.

Those Dade brothers, the Kid thought. Those funny, silly old men. They turned me in. It just goes to show that a man is never safe. He may plan cleverly, but something goes wrong. Something always goes wrong. A pair of silly old men, scared of their own shadows, like the Dade brothers, can wreck a man's life and bring him to the gallows. Life is a very funny thing.

...Now I am finished, he thought. They will cart me in a wagon to Sacramento, and they will hang me, and that is the end.

No, it is not the end. I can't give up.

I must still fight because there's nothing to lose. My life is gone anyway. I can't give up because of a pair of broken legs. I can still fight—somehow, some way. There is always a way for the Monterey Kid.

He read other news in the paper, read about a new strike on the North Fork of the American River, a new strike on the Stanislaus, the Yuba. Men were trekking into the mountains after gold again. He read, on the last page, that Grandma Cartwright was dead.

The paper said:

Mrs. A. J. Cartwright, known throughout the mountains as Grandma Cartwright, known for the fine flapjacks she sold to countless prospectors over the years, known for her ready stake to a man in need of one, known as a friend to all the men in the Sierras, rich or poor, has passed away. Hundreds of us will miss her.

Grandma Cartwright's body now lies in state at the Whitman Undertaking Parlor in Three Pines. Next week, on Friday, the casket will be brought down on a wagon driven by our friend Joe Galt. Joe Galt will drive the body to Sacramento, where it will be buried in the Sunset Cemetery beside the body of her late husband—our old friend, George Cartwright, prospector, adventurer, friend of us all.

The Monterey Kid read that article over again. He read it many times, each time more intently. Then he rested back against the pillows on his cot and called out, "*Señor Marshall! Mister Marshall!*"

Short John Marshall came into the cell. "You want something?"

"Yes, *Señor*. If it is not too much trouble."

"What do you want?"

"Well—" the Kid tried to move his legs under the blanket. They wouldn't move. They only pained him. "Tomorrow—Friday—we go to Sacramento, *si?*"

"That's right."

"And I die in Sacramento?"

"You hang there," Short John said.

The Kid nodded and smiled as if Sacramento was only a place where they gave him a new start instead of hanging him.

He said, "I have one small request. I would like to see Sadie tonight."

"Sadie the Queen?"

"Si, *Señor*. If it is not too much trouble."

"All right," said Short John. "Sadie's been here every day. She'd like to see you. I'll go get her."

"*Gracias*," said the Monterey Kid.

SHORT JOHN Marshall went down the street and fetched Sadie the Queen from Anderson's Saloon. Sadie came back with him to the jail, and Short John asked his niece to search her, hunting for any concealed weapon. Then Short John locked Sadie in the cell with the Monterey Kid.

She knelt down by the cot and took the Kid's hands and held them to her cheek. Her cheek was soft, cool.

"Hello, Kid," she said.

"Hello, Sadie."

She was a shapely woman, over thirty. The black silk dress fit tightly, and was cut so low on her bare powdered back that ladies didn't even glance at her on the street. A man with a family was considered gay if he ever so much as raised his hat to Sadie the Queen. She wore ruffled petticoats under her daring dress and always lifted them high so that men could get a glimpse of her ankles. In the Sierra, the gossip columns knew her well, and the family men considered her a bad woman.

The Monterey Kid, lying on his cell cot, drew her toward him and kissed her painted lips. It didn't matter to him that she was a bad woman. He was bad himself. By the laws of honest living, they were both bad.

He kissed her again, pulling her closer to him, and then he began to whisper to her.

"I love you, Sadie. *Yo te amo.*"

"I've been here every day," she said. "Waiting."

"The gallows also wait," he told her. "They're going to take me to Sacramento in a wagon. Hang me." He cleared his throat and added, "But you must not worry, Saddle. They can't do it."

She cradled his head against her shoulder. "I love you, Kid. Whatever happens, remember that."

"I'm going to escape," he announced.

She looked around quickly to make sure Short John Marshall wasn't eavesdropping. She was sure. Short John was in the next room, down the hall, by the front door to the jail.

She said, "You can't do it, Kid. Not with two broken legs."

"I can do it," he said. "You wait and see. Even with two broken legs I can do it. They can't hang the Monterey Kid."

She had paint on her lashes, and the paint came loose under the tears and streaked her cheeks. "You don't stand a chance, Kid. It's lucky you weren't lynched already. A mob has been here at the jail. They'd take you away from Short John Marshall, except there's a new gold strike and they're all leaving town to go on the strike."

"I'll escape," he repeated confidently.

"With two broken legs?"

"With two broken legs."

"But you can't do it!" Her voice was tense, breathless. He could smell the perfume in her hair—strong, enchanting.

"Yes, I can. You'll see. I'll do it."

"But I can't bring you a gun. Short John had his niece search me."

"I don't need a gun."

"But how can you do it? Even if you escaped from the jail, you can't ride, not even if I got you a horse. And even if you could, how far would you get? They'd have a posse out after you. You couldn't even ride as far as Auburn before they got you."

"I realize that," the Monterey Kid said with a smile. "I won't ride a horse. I'll

ride a coffin. I'll ride it clean to Sacramento. Do you know this fellow Joe Galt?"

"Yes, I know Joe Galt."

"I want you to talk to him. I'll be out of this jail before morning. I'll be in a coffin, but I'll be alive instead of dead. I'll go to Sacramento in a wagon, but not to be hanged. You go talk to Joe Galt. Joe's a good friend of mine. He'll help us. We can trust Joe."

"As long as he's not drunk," Sadie said.

"He won't be drunk."

Sadie said in a whisper, "But how can we overcome John Marshall without a gun?"

"I don't need a gun," he assured her again. "You go out and talk to Joe Galt. I'll tell you what to tell him. After you've told him that, keep your eye on this jail." He pointed to the oil lamp burning in a wall bracket. "When that goes out, you and Joe Galt can come in."

She held his head tighter against her shoulder, clung to him. "You can't do it, Kid! You can't do it."

"I'll do it," he promised. "What have I to lose? This Grandma Cartwright helped a lot of men while she lived, and now she'll help me while she's dead."

He sat up on the cot. "Don't worry, Sadie. Just do as I tell you. And the first thing is to see Joe Galt. You listen to what I tell you."

"I'm listening," Sadie said tensely.

UP TILL midnight of that night men were still coming into Three Pines. They came in wagons, on horses, and they came on foot, leading pack animals. They came in a constant parade, some of them to stay through the night, many of them to stay only long enough to feed the animals and patronize the saloons.

Once more in its history the town of Three Pines became a boom town, a jumping-off place for the new strikes on the

North Fork of the American. Prices shot skyward. Feed went up seventy percent in less than twenty-four hours; liquor went up a hundred. Down at McGivern's stable there was only one horse unsold, and the price on that was a thousand dollars. Men were sleeping on the stable floor, in the loft, in the sheds, in the pews of the church. After dusk you couldn't buy lodging for any price, and the Nevada House had closed its restaurant because the kitchen had run out of food.

All the regular citizens of Three Pines went to bed that night except the barkeepers, who intended to stay up while the liquor held out. Transient prospectors made the saloons their havens; they had no other place to go. Men stood ten deep at the bar in the Nevada House, passing drinks over their heads to those who couldn't get near.

At times, here and there, there was talk of the Monterey Kid. "They got him, eh? Where? Over at Marshall's jail? The hell he is! We ought to go over and lynch the murdering—"

Many times through the night there was this talk of yanking the Monterey Kid from the jail and lynching him right here in Three Pines. But it never got farther than talk. After all, the new strike was all important, and why bother to string up the Monterey Kid anyhow when Short John planned to take him down to Sacramento in the morning and hang him officially?

THAT NIGHT Sadie the Queen was busy, but not in her usual way.

She didn't take a single drink at Anderson's Saloon, where she was paid to drink with the customers, and she didn't take a drink at any other saloon either.

She went into the bar at the Nevada House wearing a man's overalls and boots and a big, heavy coat. She didn't look so beautiful without paint and powder. She didn't care.

"Any of you boys here seen Joe Galt?" A prospector put his arm about her. "Joe Galt? He's off drunk somewhere. How about you and me having a couple drinks?"

Sadie pulled away from him with a tired smile. "I'm not working tonight, Al."

Al said, "It's a hell of a night for you not to drink, Sadie."

She went to Martin's Saloon, walked straight through the crowd of men, and asked the bartender, "You seen Joe Galt?"

"He was here a while ago, Sadie. Pretty drunk. I think he went down to Anderson's."

In the driving rain, along the muddy street, Sadie returned to Anderson's Saloon. The lights of it shown on the puddles in the street and gave sparkling like to the rain. She went inside and found Joe Galt drinking with a group of men near the stove. She got Joe aside and talked to him in whispers. There were lots of comments from the prospectors.

"Look at them two lovebirds!"

"Nice going, Joe!"

Joe Galt listened solemnly to what Sadie had to say to him, nodding as she talked, and then he said to her in a tense whisper. "You can count on me, Sadie. I don't like it, but I'll do it."

"You can't get in any trouble, Joe. No matter what happens, you're in the clear."

"I'll do it," he said.

"Then don't get drunk."

"I'm not drunk, Sadie."

"All right. Maybe you're not. But you're awful close to it. You're not dependable when you're drunk."

Joe Galt frowned indignantly. "At a time like this you can absolutely count on me. I won't get drunk."

"Then don't even have another drink. Promise me?"

"I promise," said Joe Galt.

Sadie the Queen went again into the rain, out along the muddy street. It was getting close to midnight now and only one prospector was coming into town. He came on a horse, his bags tied behind the saddle, and he rode up toward the lights of the Nevada House. That left Sadie the only person outside in the rain.

For several hours now she'd been going from one place to another through the town. Up to Whitman's Undertaking Parlor to see if the lights had gone out. Up to the jail to see if the light in the Kid's cell had gone out. To one saloon after another, looking for Joe Galt. Her boots were heavy with mud. Rain had gotten down her neck and her clothes clung damp and cold to her body.

Once more she walked past the Whitman Undertaking Parlors, a small frame shack behind Martin's Saloon. This time the lights were out. Also, the lights were out in Doc Whitman's house a hundred yards beyond.

Again she went to the Nevada House, walking around to the back of it. Through a window she saw Short John Marshall in his bedroom. He was sitting on the bed, pulling his boots off. That meant only the deputy, Ken McBride, remained at the jail to keep the Kid in, the lynchers out.

She returned once more to the jail, and her heart gave a sharp thump when she saw no light in the barrel window of the Kid's cell. *He's done it*, she thought.

She said to herself, "*Yo te amo*, Kid! I'm with you, no matter what."

AROUND the front of the jail there was nobody at all. It was a good thing about the gold strike. It saved the Kid from being lynched right there in Three Pines.

In the dark, with the driving rain coming down hard, she stood at the door of John Marshall's office and tried the latch. It was locked as usual from the inside. She started to turn away when the latch

clicked, and the door opened a crack.

For long seconds she stood there saying nothing. For long seconds the door didn't move, just remained open that crack.

Finally she said in a husky whisper, "Hello, I'd like to see the Monterey Kid."

"Hello, Sadie," said the Kid.

She pushed the door open wide and found him on the floor, where he'd dragged himself in spite of two broken legs. She knelt down beside him and cradled his head against her rain-soaked coat. "You poor kid—you poor old kid."

"I'm all right," he said.

The light in the office came from a single lantern burning low on Short John Marshall's desk.

"I'll put that out," Sadie said quickly.

"No," he told her. "Don't touch it. If it goes out, they'll suspect something. The light going out in my cell is all right. But till morning they must think Ken McBride is still here in the office."

"Ken's not here?"

"Yes, Ken is here. In the cell."

She said quickly, "If you just locked him in, he can call for help. If you—"

The Monterey Kid lay on the floor with his two bandaged legs straight out before him. He smiled in a hard amused way, saying, "Ken McBride won't call. He is in the cell, but he won't call."

Sadie studied his hard, bearded face a long moment. She rubbed a hand across her eyes. "Oh," she said, "I see."

He nodded slowly. "I got sick. I called for Ken to come into my cell. He came. He bent over the cot." The Kid gestured with his hands, clenching them into strangling fists.

"I see," she said, cutting him short. "Please don't tell me about it."

He looked at her, a little puzzled. "You are mad at me, Sadie?"

"No. I'm not mad. I guess it's all right. I told you I'm with you, no matter what happens. I just wish—"

"What do you wish, Sadie?"

CHAPTER THREE

Strange Cargo

"I just wish—that it could be different. I wish that you and me . . ."

He smiled in that cynical way. "You wish that I could be a respectable man, Sadie?"

Her eyes probed into his, then she shook her head. "No, I guess not. If you were a good man you wouldn't have anything to do with me, and I wouldn't be any better off. So let's both of us forget it. I'm with you. What do we do next, Kid? I'm ready."

"You have Joe Galt ready?"

"Yes, Joe's ready."

"Then go to that desk and get Short John's gun."

"You have a gun," she said, glancing at the one in his hand.

"This belonged to Ken McBride. Now I need another."

She went to the desk, tried the drawers. Her hands had always seemed white and soft, but now they were white and hard, active, searching through the drawers of the desk. She got the gun and brought it back, with cartridges, to the Monterey Kid.

She tried not to look into the cell. But her eyes strayed there, and she saw the body of Ken McBride on the floor by the Kid's cot. His face was puffed and blue in the dim lamplight from the desk. The Kid, lying on the cot, with two broken legs, had strangled him to death.

"We must go now," the Kid said. "When we go out, be sure that the latch becomes locked from the inside. It must remain that way until morning." He glanced down at his legs and smiled in that hard, amused way he had. "I do not expect you to carry me, Sadie. But if you will please get your hands under my shoulders I think you can drag me." He laughed softly. "It's funny. The Monterey Kid, even with two broken legs, can escape."

"These newspapers, we will give them plenty to write about. Ah, si!"

SADIE THE Queen dragged him through the night from the jail to Doc Whitman's Undertaking Parlor. Once they saw a drunken prospector coming down the road, and Sadie dragged the Kid into an alley between the Nevada House and the hardware store. She crouched in the mud with the Kid while the drunk went past, not seeing them.

After he had gone, The Kid said, "You are a fine woman, Sadie."

"No, I'm not." She said it tensely, in a way he had to believe. "I'm no good. Neither are you."

She dragged him up through the alley to the back of Doc Whitman's Undertaking Parlor. "You wait here. I'll get Joe Galt. Doc Whitman has gone home to bed. We can get in through the window."

She went away into the darkness and left the Kid lying there under the window of the mortuary. He had a gun in each hand, his broken legs spread out before him, stiffly, in their splints. The legs hurt. Pain shot in quick stabs into his body. Pain brought sweat to his forehead in big, oozing beads. He clenched his teeth and smiled in the dark, while the rain lashed at him.

After a while Sadie came back. She had somebody with her, and even in the dark he knew it was Joe Galt.

"Hello," the Kid whispered calmly. "Now open the window so we can get in."

Joe Galt worked on the window, fumbling, and finally Sadie took the knife from his hands and pried it open herself.

"Let's go in," said the Kid.

They carried him over the sill, lifted him down again on the floor. A single lamp was burning in there, burning on a table placed near the casket. The casket set on a pair of saw-horses, with lighted candles on it. Sadie drew the curtains

across the window they had entered. Her hands trembled. She didn't speak.

Joe Galt pulled a bottle of whiskey from his pocket, had a drink and offered the bottle to the Kid. "You'd better have one."

"I don't want one," the Kid said. His face was ashen, and he winced as though his legs gave him terrific pain. His legs did. He smiled and said, "Open the coffin."

"Me?" said Joe Galt.

"Yes, you."

"Not me. Let Sadie do it. Sadie, you do it."

Sadie's face was white, without powder. She didn't move.

The Kid said to Joe Galt, "Open it. You have a knife. Pry the screws loose and lift off the lid."

Joe Galt got out the knife, took a long time getting the blade open and then pried under the screws. His hands shook so much that he cut himself.

"Don't be afraid, you monkey!" the Kid told him.

"I'm not afraid. But I don't like to bother the dead. A man shouldn't bother the dead."

The Kid snapped, "Get it open! Get the body out!"

Finally Joe Galt got the lid off the casket and looked in. He took another drink from the bottle.

"Don't be afraid of her," the Kid said. "She's dead. That's just her body. Old Grandma Cartwright—she has helped a lot of men in her time, and now, even dead, she will help another man. Get her out. Sadie, you help him."

Sadie stroked a hand over her face and took the bottle from Joe Galt. She tipped the bottle to her lips.

"All right," she said. She handed the bottle back to Joe Galt. Then she reached into the coffin and all by herself lifted out the dead body of Grandma Cartwright. She placed the body on the floor. Her

face got whiter. "Oh, my Lord! My Lord!" she whispered.

"Don't feel bad, Sadie," the Kid said. "I don't want you to feel bad."

Joe Galt took another drink from the bottle, saying, "I can't do it. I don't have no religion, but I can't do it. It's a sin to bother the dead."

The Kid said angrily, "Pick me up, you monkey! Put me in that coffin!"

Joe Galt got his hands under the Kid's shoulders and Sadie took the Kid's legs. A grunt of pain slipped past his lips when she took him by the legs. She shifted her hold on him, got him by the hips.

"I'm sorry, Kid."

"That's all right," he said. "Lift me."

They lifted him, and put him in the coffin, on the satin and plush, where the body of Grandma Cartwright had been. The coffin smelled of flowers and enblaming fluid. It smelled of the dead.

"That's fine," said the Kid. "Give me that knife."

When he got the knife from Joe Galt he bored several small holes in the sides of the casket, near the mouldings, where they wouldn't show from the outside.

He said, "When you screw the lid down, don't make it tight. Leave air space. And leave that bottle."

He took the whiskey from Joe Galt and placed it on the satin pillow near his head. He had a gun near each hand now, on the satin at his sides.

Sadie the Queen seemed about to faint. "You can't do it, Kid! You can't!"

He smiled at her reassuringly. "Sure I can do it, Sadie. The Monterey Kid can do anything. This will give them plenty to talk about. You and Joe Galt take that body out of here. Take it into Baker Canyon and hide it. In the morning Joe Galt will come around and put the coffin on the wagon. It's a fine joke. Everybody thinks it is the coffin with the body of Grandma Cartwright. Joe will drive the wagon to Sacramento. No one will stop

him. In Sacramento, Joe will not drive to the cemetery as he is scheduled. He will drive to the Gomez ranch. Manuel Gomez is my best friend. I will be sheltered there. I will come out of the coffin, and we shall fill the coffin with stones, and then Joe can take the coffin to the cemetery where it will be buried. Who can know what has happened? The Monterey Kid has escaped; the body of Grandma Cartwright is buried in Sacramento. Who knows what has really happened?"

Sadie said in a weary monotone, "It's not religious. Like Joe says; it's a bad sin to bother the dead."

The Kid smiled. "The dead are dead. Grandma Cartwright is buried in Baker Canyon instead of the cemetery in Sacramento. Who knows the difference?"

"Yeah," Joe Galt nodded skeptically. "But suppose they find the body of Grandma?"

"What if they do? I shall have escaped. I shall be many miles away. And you and Sadie? You two know nothing about it."

Joe Galt said, "Let me have one more drink." He took the bottle from the casket beside the Kid and had a last pull on it.

"I'll pay you ten thousand dollars for this," the Kid told him. He smiled at Sadie. "As for Sadie—I shall always love you, Sadie. After this, our hearts beat closer together."

"Or farther apart," Sadie said.

The Kid waved a hand. "We must stop talking. Screw down the casket. Take away the body of Grandma." He smiled. "Remember, Sadie, that life is funny. Life is silly. And the Monterey Kid, with two broken legs, can do the impossible. Be sure to clean up the mud from the floor. Be sure to close the window again. At dawn the Monterey Kid will be going to Sacramento in a wagon, but not in John Marshall's wagon, not to be hanged. The Monterey Kid will be going in a coffin, but not dead. *Adios, Sadie. Yo te amo. Hasta la vista.*"

Sadie and Joe Galt lifted up the lid of the coffin, put it over him, while he lay there smiling. They left the screws loose, the lid wedged up, as he could have air. They heard him singing soft Spanish songs to himself, joking with himself.

THAT SAME night, between midnight and three A.M., Joe Galt and Sadie the Queen carried the body of Grandma Cartwright deep into the bottom of Baker Canyon. They went down there in the pitch darkness, groping their way, while rain dripped down from the great dark pines and wet branches lashed them. Sometimes they slipped on the wet mat of pine needles. Down in the bottom they heard the rushing gurgle of Baker Creek, now a torrent in the storm, and they felt their way step by step among the boulders and through the dense undergrowth.

They found a place near the mouth of the creek, where it rushed into the bouncing dark waters of the river, a place Joe Galt knew about, and they stowed the dead body in a cave and covered it with stones.

At nearly four A.M. they got back again to Three Pines. Nobody at all was on the streets. The lights in the Nevada House had gone out. McGivern's stable was dark. The saloons, except Anderson's, had closed.

Sadie said, "Go to bed now, Joe. What time do you start with the wagon to Sacramento?"

"Doc Whitman told me to leave at six," Joe said.

"All right. You get some rest. And remember, drive easy, and when you get into Sacramento head out north to the Gomez ranch. Speak to Manuel Gomez. He's a friend of the Kid's."

"You can count on me," Joe said.

"Don't get drunk, Joe."

He shook his head in the dark. His hands trembled. He thought about the body of Grandma Cartwright and what

they had done with it. He thought about the Kid lying there in the coffin, with candles burning, in Doc Whitman's Undertaking Parlor.

He said to Sadie, "You and the Kid can count on me. I won't have nothing except a little nightcap."

"Don't even have the nightcap. Promise me?"

"I promise," Joe said. "But it's a hell of a thing if anybody finds out what we've done. It's not just helping the Kid escape. It's worse than that. You can't bother the dead. If they find out about it—well, you're a woman. You're all right. But me—well, I don't know what they'd do to me."

Sadie put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry about it, Joe. The hard part, as far as you're concerned, is all over. You have nothing to worry about. If you get stopped tomorrow, even if they find out that Kid is in that coffin, it won't get you into trouble. All you're doing is driving the body of Grandma Cartwright to Sacramento. You don't know any of the rest. You just put the coffin on the wagon and drive. Can I count on you, Joe?"

"You can absolutely count on me."

She said, "Remember not to drink. You're not dependable when you drink. You lost your job on the stage line for being drunk. You lost your job with the Wells Fargo Company for getting drunk. You got fired off three jobs as a mule-skinner for being drunk . . ."

He waved a hand. "All that's in the past, Sadie. You and the Kid can count on me. I'm absolutely dependable."

Sadie the Queen went to her room in the Three Pines Hotel. The Hotel was the second floor of Anderson's Saloon. She could hear the loud voices of men, the clink of glasses, vulgar songs which she knew word for word. She could hear it all through the flimsy floor.

She got out of her wet clothes and put

on a red silk dress. She turned out all the lamps in her room and sat by the window and stared out in the dark toward the undertaking parlors.

She said to herself, "I won't fail you, Kid. Me and Joe did our part. I'm with you, Kid."

She thought of him lying there in the coffin with his two broken legs, his two guns, the bottle of whiskey. He was a bad man, but she loved him. After all, she wasn't much good herself.

Fatigue crept insidiously over her body; the muscles in her legs ached from the hike into Baker Canyon, carrying Grandma Cartwright. She felt her eyes getting heavy with the sleep of exhaustion, physical exhaustion, nervous and emotional exhaustion. She got up and drank some whiskey.

Then she sat down by the window again to keep her vigil.

Her head nodded. She woke herself up and had another drink. She drowsed again. She woke herself up, and it was daylight outside. The rain had stopped. Sunshine sparkled in the muddy pools in the street. Men and horses, men and wagons, men and pack mules were leaving the town, going up through the mud on the road to Indian Bluff and the gold strike.

She put on the first pair of shoes she could grab from her closet, high-heeled dancing pumps, and she hurried down the stairs and into the saloon. Frank Anderson was mopping up the bar.

"Frank!"

"Hello, Sadie."

"What time is it?"

"It's—say, what's the matter, Sadie?"

"What time is it, Frank?"

"Twenty minutes past nine. Say, what's the matter with you, Sadie? Did you hear about the Monterey Kid?"

A nervous hand went to her throat. Her face was pale, and there was no color to her lips, ordinarily scarlet.

She said huskily, "The Kid? What about the Kid?"

"He escaped. Killed Ken McBride, choked him to death. Got away."

She said inanely, "With two broken legs?"

"Yeah. Old Short John Marshall went into the jail at six this morning. He was going to drive the Kid to Sacramento to hang him. But the Kid was gone and Ken McBride was dead. Short John scattered out a party of thirty-four men. Short John figures the Kid can't get far. Not with two broken legs. It's a cinch he can't get far on a horse, even if he got a horse. Old Short John figures maybe the Kid is riding a wagon.

Sadie gave a shudder and closed her eyes. "Wagon? What wagon?"

"Well, Short John figures maybe the Kid slipped into one of the wagons heading for the strike. So the posse has a blockade at Boulder Gap, searching all the wagons. Five men went over the trail to Forest Hills. Three men headed down the road to Auburn. In the meantime, a lot of men are combing the brush in the canyons, figuring maybe the Kid crawled away without help."

"Oh," said Sadie tensely. "Oh."

She went outside into the street and her slippers sank deep in the mud. She saw four men on horses, wearing deputy badges, carrying rifles, gallop down the road to Auburn. She crossed the street to the Nevada House, where Doc Whitman always had his late breakfast, and she met Doc Whitman coming out.

When she saw him she regained her poise. "Good morning, Doctor," she said, smiling.

"Hello, Sadie."

She said, "I've been wondering about the body of dear Grandma Cartwright. I always loved her. Did the body start to Sacramento all right?"

Doc Whitman nodded briefly. "The casket left at six-fifteen."

Sadie muttered something under her breath. To the doctor, it sounded like she had said, "Thank the Lord!"

But the doctor knew that Sadie the Queen was not a religious woman—far from it—so he concluded, as he hiked across the street, that he'd been mistaken.

SADIE went back to Anderson's feeling better. It was all right now. The Kid was on his way. The posse would search all the wagons, but they wouldn't think to open a coffin supposedly carrying the body of Grandma Cartwright. Joe Galt would drive the wagon right through to Sacramento, swing out to the Gomez ranch, and the Kid would be free. His poor broken legs, though. It would take a long time for them to heal.

At the bar she said, "I want a drink, Frank."

Frank said, "You look happy, Sadie."

"I feel all right."

Frank put a bottle and a glass on the bar. "There's lots in Three Pines this morning who can't say the same." He grinned and jerked a thumb toward a door behind the bar. "I got nine of 'em in the back room. Sleeping it off. Practically dead. So full of liquor it's practically coming out their ears."

Sadie poured whiskey into the glass, lifted the glass to her lips. "Is that so?"

"Yeah. Nine of 'em. Out like a light, sleeping it off. There's Old Man Caffrey. You should've see him last night. And Jed Fulton, too. And Danny Greenfield, and Joe Galt, and Louis—What's the matter, Sadie?"

The glass had only gotten to Sadie's lips. It slipped from her fingers, smashed on the floor near her muddy slippers. She gripped the edge of the bar with both hands.

He said, "What's the matter, Sadie?"

"Did you say Joe Galt?"

"Yeah. Good old Joe. He come in here about four in the morning for a nightcap.

You know Joe. You know how he is. Same old Joe."

Sadie's voice was tensely husky. "Joe got drunk?"

"Drunk? Hah! You shoulda seen him. At five in the morning he got his foot caught in the position and fell down. We picked him up and poured another drink in him, but it didn't wake him up. He was out like a light."

Sadie straightened herself up, her eyes half closed. Her hands made tight fists on the edge of the bar. "Joe? Joe's here now?"

Again Frank Anderson jerked a thumb toward the back room. "Sure. He's in there. Sleeping it off."

"But how about his job?"

"What job?"

Sadie tried to keep her voice calm, tried to keep her poise. "Joe Galt was supposed to drive a wagon to Sacramento this morning at six. The body of Grandma Cartwright. I just saw Doc Whitman. Doc said the wagon left at six-fifteen."

"Sure," Frank Anderson said, pouring Sadie another drink. "The wagon left all right, but Joe Galt ain't driving it. Doc Whitman came around here and found Joe drunk, so Doc has Happy Trevors driving the wagon. The wagon and the team belong to Happy anyhow. So Doc just hired Happy to drive it. You don't need to worry about Grandma. She'll get to Sacramento all right. They'll bury her all right." He leaned across the bar and touched Sadie's hand. "Say! You look sick. What's the matter, Sadie? You look terrible sick."

Sadie didn't touch the whiskey he'd poured for her. She fled around the bar, opened the door. Nine men lay sprawled in drunken sleep on the floor in the back room. Joe Galt was one of them.

She dropped to her knees beside him, slapped him frantically, shook him till his long hair fell down over his eyes.

"Joe! Joe!"

"Le-me-lone," he grumbled stupidly. "Wanna sleep. Wanna rest. Gotta drive . . . gotta take Grandma Cartwright . . ."

She slapped him hard in the face. "Joe! Joe Galt! Speak to me; It's me! It's Sadie."

Joe Galt's eyes slowly opened. "Hello, Sadie." His voice was thick. His tongue lapped dry lips. He had a bad taste in his mouth. "Hello, Sadie. Don't worry about nothing, Sadie. I'm just getting a little rest like you said. I'll be up at six driving that wagon."

Tears blinked in her eyes. "Don't you know what time it is, Joe?"

He tried to sit up. "Is it six already?"

"It's after nine, you damned drunken fool!"

"Huh?"

"Yes, it's way after nine, and the wagon's gone. The wagon left at six-fifteen."

Joe Galt worked his tongue against the bad taste in his mouth. "The wagon left? What wagon left?"

"The one you were supposed to drive!"

"With the Monterey—"

Sadie cut him short. "With the coffin carrying Grandma Cartwright! Don't you know what you've done? Don't you realize what you've done?"

"Huh? Say, listen. Is it really nine o'clock?"

"It's after nine! Don't you understand? Don't you?"

Joe Galt tried to shake the heavy grogginess from his head. "Who's driving the wagon?"

"Happy Trevors. As long as you were drunk, Doc Whitman got Happy Trevors to drive it."

Joe said, "Happy Trevors ain't got no right to drive that wagon. I admit it's his wagon and his team, but he hired me to drive it."

Sadie closed her eyes. "Oh, Joe. You fool, you!" Her voice was not angry now, just tired. It came from deep inside

her. "That wagon's been on the road three hours already! It's almost to Auburn by now! What can we do? Happy Trevors will drive to the cemetery in Sacramento. Don't you realize that? Don't you know they'll bury the coffin in the cemetery?"

Joe Galt hadn't heard her. He was sound asleep again, snoring. She slapped him hard in the face, brought him awake, and he said, "Hello, Sadie. Please don't worry, Sadie. You and the Kid can absolutely depend on me. I'm just taking—a little rest. You wake me up—wake me up when it's six o'clock."

SADIE CAME back into the bar where Frank Anderson was polishing up glasses from the night before.

"I'll take that drink, Frank."

She took it.

"I'll take another, Frank."

He said, "Help yourself, Sadie. Say, what's the matter with you? You act like your best friend's about to be stuck in the graveyard."

Her face got whiter, her eyes shut, and he thought she might faint.

"Say! What is the matter?"

She opened her eyes, took the bottle in a quick, trembling hand, poured herself another drink. He'd never seen her drink like that before.

She said, "Look, Frank. There's a horse left, isn't there? I mean at McGiven's stable. There's still a horse for sale."

"Yeah. A thousand dollars last night. Twelve hundred this morning."

"I want that horse, Frank." She reached down under her dress, and pulled out a tiny little purse, spilling gold pieces from it on the bar. She lifted her skirts, her many petticoats, and found another purse with more gold pieces. Her white fingers counted the pieces rapidly on the bar. A little over two hundred dollars.

She leaned across the bar and caught

his hand. "Look, Frank. You like me, don't you? You've liked me a long time."

Frank smiled. When he smiled his teeth were yellow stubs.

He was a thin little man, sickly, nervous, and his eyes were small, bloodshot, always watering a little.

Now he clung to Sadie's hand, caressing it awkwardly.

"You know me, Sadie. Sure. I been liking you for a long time."

"Do you like me a thousand dollars worth?"

"Huh?"

"You heard me. Do you like me a thousand dollars worth, Frank?"

"A thousand dollars? Hell, Sadie, that's a lot—"

"Do you, Frank?"

"You mean we can get married? You mean there's just you and me? Just Sadie and Frank?"

"That's what I mean. Is it worth a thousand dollars?"

"Well," Frank began.

"You've got it, you ape. I know you've got it."

He nodded reluctantly. "All right, Sadie."

She put out her hand. "Pay, Frank. I want it right now."

He studied her shrewdly. "What's come over you, Sadie? You don't really like me."

"For a thousand dollars I do. A thousand right now."

He got the money from a sugar bowl under the bar. She snatched it up and said, "I also want that saddle and bridle you keep in the shed. And I want your revolver."

She started out the door to the street, hurrying in her high-heeled slippers, and he said, "Hey! What's the hurry? Where you going?"

"I'll be back, Frank. You can count on me. Sadie the Queen always pays her debts."

CHAPTER FOUR

One Way Passage

THE MONTEREY Kid lay, without moving, on the satin and plush in the casket. He had been there for long hours, so many hours he couldn't count them. Time no longer existed. He only knew that he was on the way to his escape.

He lay there, flat on his back. The pair of revolvers rested near his hands, and he could find them in the dark, touch his sweaty palms to the walnut stocks and feel the hard cold steel. The bottle was there too, and he had several pulls of Joe Galt's whiskey.

He discovered that it was best not to move. In the first place, his legs pained him too much, and in the second place, the coffin was too tight around him that motion was almost impossible, and in the third place, it used up the air to exert himself, and in the fourth place, if he created any sound in the casket, they would know it couldn't be the body of Grandma Cartwright and they would open the lid.

So he lay still, flat on his back, in that dark narrow coffin, while time went on endlessly.

After too much time, the casket moved. He could hear voices, but could not discern words. They were moving the casket, carrying it.

He knew it must be six in the morning, knew Doc Whitman and Joe Galt must be carrying the casket out to the wagon. He wondered if Short John Marshall had gone to the jail yet and found his captive gone and his deputy, Ken McBride, lying in the cell, strangled to death.

The casket began to jolt and shudder. He could hear the rumble of the wheels of the wagon, feel vibration, the solid rhythm of horses' hoofs. *We're on the way*, he thought. *Here we go. Many*

thanks to Sadie—she is a fine woman. Many thanks to Joe Galt—he is my friend.

The vibration became steady. He could feel the motion of the wagon. He lay there in the dark, his legs paining him. The air grew foul, stale. He sucked air into his lungs, gasped it, but only dust filtered into the coffin. It seemed like dust. He could smell the hay from McGivern's barn. He could smell sweet flowers.

This is a fine joke, he thought. *The Monterey Kid has escaped. You are all looking for him, but you don't know where to look. The Monterey Kid is on his way. He is going to Sacramento on a wagon, but not to be hanged.*

The Kid finished off the bottle of whiskey, lying there in the dark.

Those newspapers, he thought. *I will give them plenty to write about.* He almost laughed. He almost banged on the lid of the coffin to attract the attention of Joe Galt. But he decided it was better not to bang on the coffin. Somebody else might be out there at this time, riding with Joe Galt. No, it was better not to knock. I was better just to ride here, lying flat, to trust Joe Galt.

Happy Trevors sat on the driver's seat of the wagon, his head nodding sleepily. He was a man of sixty, with a weak heart and he was afraid of the long trip to Sacramento. He had been afraid of the trip right from the start. That's why he had hired Joe Galt to drive the team.

Joe Galt, that drunken bum. He should have known that Joe Galt would get drunk at the last minute. Nobody should ever trust Joe Galt to drive the team.

Happy Trevors cursed under his breath as the team clopped forward on the muddy, narrow road, and the wagon wheels creaked and groaned, and the casket jolted and vibrated behind him.

Happy thought: *With my bad heart I shouldn't be driving this casket to Sacramento. I'm a sick man.*

And he thought further, *Besides, this*

gold strike on North Fork is a real one. Men will be going up there and cleaning up a fortune while me, all I do is drive the body of Grandma Cartwright to the cemetery in Sacramento. I'm a plain fool, that's what I am; I should be up there hunting gold, not just taking Old Grandma Cartwright to the cemetery. If I'm going to tax my weak heart, I might as well tax it hunting gold. Why should I drop dead on the trail taking the corpse of this old hen to Sacramento?

Thinking like that, mumbling to himself, Happy Trevors drove the wagon around a bend in the road and met three mounted men, armed with rifles. One of the men was Short John Marshall.

Happy Trevors stepped on the foot brake, hauled tight on the lines, bringing the wagon to a stop.

"Hello, Short John," he said.

"Hello, Happy."

Happy Trevors glanced at the rifles they carried and said, "You boys seem like you're armed for big game."

"We are," said Short John sternly. "We're armed for the Monterey Kid. He killed Ken McBride and escaped from the jail."

"I heard about that before I left," Happy told them. "You figure he come down this way?"

"We don't know what to figure. We just know he got away. So were blocking all the roads and trails, and I got men out beating the brush. Its a cinch he can't get far. Not with two broken legs. Unless maybe he snuck inside a wagon. So we're stopping all wagons."

Happy Trevors laughed boisterously. "You want to search my wagon, Short John? I got a coffin here, but you're sure welcome to open it. You just open it up and see if the Monterey Kid has snuck inside there instead of Grandma Cartwright!"

Short John Marshall didn't laugh. He was a solemn little man with gray hair

and a gray beard. He carried his badge of office with dignity. He said, "You shouldn't talk like that, Happy. A man should always respect the dead. Grandma Cartwright was a fine old lady, and I don't like to hear you speak disrespectful of her."

"You don't want to open the casket?"

Short John Marshall stroked his beard impatiently. "You get on there, Happy, and you take good care of that body. You get it down to the cemetery in Sacramento so it can be buried proper."

"I will, Short John."

"Where's Joe Galt? I thought you hired Joe Galt to drive the wagon?"

Happy shrugged. "I did. But Joe got drunk again, so I have to drive it myself." He lifted the lines, slapped them on the horses' rumps, letting off the foot brake. "Well, so long, Short John." He nodded to the deputies. "I hope you get that there Monterey Kid. He's a dirty skunk, and I sure hope you get him."

"We'll get him all right," Short John said.

The wagon went bumping on its way, clattering on the narrow, winding road to Auburn, while Short John Marshall and his men remained ready at the bend, ready to search all wagons that might carry the Monterey Kid, fugitive.

SADIE THE queen hurried into the Three Pines Stable and paid twelve hundred dollars, cash, for the only horse not yet sold. "Keep him for me," she said.

She ran back across the street, her ruffled petticoats dragging in the mud. One of her slippers came off. She stooped for it, snatched it up, but didn't bother to put it on her foot again.

On the other side of the street she kicked off the other slipper, now carrying both of them, and ran in her stocking feet into Anderson's saloon.

"I'll take that saddle, Frank. And the

bridle. And I'll take your revolver."

"You seem in a powerful hurry, Sadie."

"I am. But keep your mouth shut. Remember, it's you and me now. Frank and Sadie. As long as you keep your mouth shut."

His small eyes narrowed, and he touched lean fingers to his face. "Is it something about the Monterey Kid, Sadie?"

"You keep your mouth shut. Otherwise. . ."

He waved a hand. "You can count on me, Sadie."

She returned to the Three Pines Stable carrying the heavy saddle. The bridle was looped around her neck. She also carried her muddy slippers, and Frank Anderson's revolver was concealed under her dress.

Bill Dowst, at the stable, saddled the horse for her and helped her to mount. She straddled the saddle, man-fashion, with her skirts and petticoats hiked up high on her legs.

Bill Dowst said, "Did you hear about the Monterey Kid, Sadie? He got away. Killed Ken McBride and got clean away."

"Is that so?" Sadie's voice was a calm as she could make it. "Well, I hope they got him. I used to like him, but not since he's a killer. I hope they got him."

"Where you headed for in such a hurry, Sadie?"

"Auburn. My sister Lou. I just heard about her. She had an accident. A gun went off. She's dying."

"That's too bad, Sadie," Bill Dowst told her. "I'm sorry to hear about it."

She thought to herself, *I'm coming, Kid. Something went wrong, and the wrong man is driving the wagon, but I'm coming. They can't get you, Kid. They can't bury you alive in that grave in Sacramento. I'm on my way, Kid.*

She rode the horse from the stable, galloped fast down the muddy street on the road to Auburn, riding in the silk

ruffled dress, no shoes on her stocking feet, her hair blowing loose in the wind.

Doc Whitman, passing the stable, met Bill Dowst and bowed greeting. "Was that Sadie the Queen?"

"Yeah. That's her. Some gal, huh?"

The doctor frowned solemnly. "A terrible woman. A disgrace to modern civilization. Where's she going, riding like that?"

"Auburn," said Bill Dowst. "Her sister had an accident."

THE MONTEREY Kid, lying flat on his back in the casket, wondered what time it was. The wagon had stopped once and he could hear voices, but he couldn't tell what was said. He suspected that maybe one of Short John Marshall's posses had stopped the wagon and questioned Joe Galt. The wagon was on its way again.

In the casket, lying there in the dark, the Kid found breathing difficult. Dust came in. It was queer that there should be dust since the road was muddy. Yet he knew that the dust came from the grain, the hay, the many past loads which the wagon had carried. The smell of Grandma Cartwright, embalming fluid, flowers and stale perfume, was always with him.

That's all right, he thought. I'm getting out. Everything is fine.

His legs had gone dead on him. They no longer hurt. He reached his hand down and pinched himself, but he couldn't feel any hurt. *They're dead, he thought.*

The Dade Brothers, Theodore and Lawrence, were going back into the mountains again. They had been down to Auburn, where they'd procured a new stake from their cousin, and they also had collected two thousand dollars reward for telling Short John Marshall about the Monterey Kid.

In Auburn, in the early morning, they had heard that the Monterey Kid had

killed a deputy, a man named Ken McBride, and had escaped from the jail.

Lawrence Dade said to his brother, "Now the Kid's escaped again, maybe we'll have to give back the two thousand dollars."

"Let's get out of here," Theodore said. "Let's hit the trail and hit it fast, while we still got the two thousand."

So the Dades left Auburn long before noon, heading back into the mountains on another gold hunt. They had lots of equipment packed on the backs of two animals. They still had the original mule, still lame, and they had a new mule, named Betsy.

Betsy broke her leg in a gopher hole going down the steep grade to Middle Fork, and Theodore put the Navy Colt to her head and shot her.

They took the packs from Betsy's back, as she lay there in the road, and tied them on the back of the lame mule.

"We'll never make it this way," Lawrence said. "You can't make a lame mule carry a double load. We better go back."

Theodore shook his head. "The Dades never go back. We'll go along like this till we can buy another mule."

"Where?"

"Maybe in Three Pines."

"It'll cost us plenty."

Theodore said, "We still got two thousand dollars, ain't we?"

So they went on.

They crossed the wooden covered bridge over North Fork, just above Middle Fork, and on it they met a man coming down from Three Pines.

The man told them, "If you boys aim to get a mule in Three Pines, you're out of luck. Everything is sold out there except a horse at the stable—twelve hundred dollars."

"We'll go on," Theodore said.

So the Dades, leading the lame, overburdened mule, went up the steep, twist-

ing road from the bridge to Three Pines.

The road knotted around cliffs, knifed through stunted pines, clinging to the slopes, always going higher and higher.

Lawrence said, "Here comes a wagon."

"It's Happy Trevors," Theodore said.

The wagon stopped in front of them, Happy Trevors standing on his brake.

"Hello, boys. Where you going?"

"The gold strike," Theodore said.

"Another?"

"It's no fooling this time. It's a fine strike. Me and Lawrence, we're coming back rich. It's a real strike, Happy. You ought to be going to it yourself. What you going the wrong way for?"

HAPPY TREVORS jerked a thumb at the casket on the back of the wagon. "This is Grandma Cartwright. Got to take her to Sacramento and bury her."

"That's too bad, Happy. You ought to be heading for the strike."

"Don't I know it!" said Happy Trevors, disgustedly. "But what can I do? Joe Galt got drunk, and Doc Whitman hired my team to take the body to Sacramento. That's the way life is."

Theodore Dade had been studying the wagon, studying the two horses in the traces. He chewed his tobacco thoughtfully and finally he asked, "What you figure that there team is worth, Happy?"

"You mean now?"

"Now."

"Well, it's not much of a team, but with the gold strike I ought to get a thousand dollars."

Theodore said, "How'd you like a thousand dollars cash right now and a third partnership in what Lawrence and me get from the strike? How'd you like to get the thousand right in your hand, turn that team around and go back?"

Happy Trevors said, "Huh?"

Theodore removed his right boot and took a thousand dollars from it. "All right,

Happy. Here you are. Now you're partners with Lawrence and me."

Happy Trevors eyed the money greedily, and the proposition of going on a gold hunt made his old heart pound and mutter. "You boys want me?"

"Sure, we want you, Happy."

"But how about old Grandma Cartwright?" He pointed to the casket.

"You don't leave her," Theodore said. "It happens this way. You're coming down this steep grade, and you're coming fast. The coffin slips off the back of the wagon and goes over the cliff. You can't help it if the coffin falls off, can you?"

"Well—"

Theodore went on, "Of course you can't help it. The coffin just slipped off when the wagon came down the grade. Grandma Cartwright don't care, 'cause she's dead anyhow. So you get a thousand dollars from Lawrence and me, and you become our partner, and we go back to the strike. Our mule is lame, carrying double, so we'll load our stuff on your wagon."

Happy Trevors stroked his jaw thoughtfully. "It don't seem respectful to the dead. Old Grandma Cartwright—"

"She's dead, ain't she? Come, on Lawrence."

The two Dades, Theodore and Lawrence, lifted the heavy weight of the coffin and carried it to the edge of the road.

"Come on, Lawrence," Theodore said. "Heave it over."

The Monterey Kid knew the wagon had stopped. He could hear voices again. *This is really a fine joke, he thought. I wish I had more whiskey. Something is the matter with my legs; they don't hurt.*

Then he thought, *Why are they lifting me? We can't be in Sacramento already, not even to Auburn yet. But it must be all right. Joe Galt, he is a fine fellow. And Sadie . . . there is only one Sadie.*

The casket is being lifted off the wagon. Why is that? Why are they talk-

ing? Who are they? What are they saying?

The Kid, lying flat on his back, lying there in the dark stuffy casket, tightened his hands on the revolvers. He began to sweat. Sweat broke out all over his body

SADIE TIE, queen, on a horse sleek with sweat, foam under the cinch and at the edges of the saddle blanket, rode around a bend in the road and pulled up short on the reins. Short John Marshall was sitting there on a horse, a rifle in his hands.

"Hello, Sadie," he said. "You seem in a terrible hurry."

"My sister—it's my sister, Lou. She had an accident in Auburn. I have to get to her before she dies."

"Did you hear about the escape of the Monterey Kid?"

"I heard he escaped."

"He killed Ken McBride."

"I heard that too. May I go on?"

Short John Marshall fingered his gray beard. "You're not properly dressed for riding, Sadie. Suppose the storm comes up again?"

"Please, Mr. Marshall! May I go on?"

"You may go on," he said.

She rode fast around the bend, her ruffled skirts high up on her legs, and the men watched after her.

One of the deputies said, "I figure we ought to follow her, Short John. She's the sweetheart of the Monterey Kid. Maybe she's going to him now."

Short John gave an impatient grunt. "Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Warrington. We've been watching this road for three hours. The Kid couldn't get past us, could he?"

THE DADE Brothers, Theodore and Lawrence, held the casket between them and swung it back and forth, ready to heave it into the canyon.

Happy Trevors said, "I don't like to

have you do it. This is not respectful to Grandma Cartwright."

"She's dead, ain't she?"

"Well . . ."

"Let's heave it, Lawrence."

The casket left their hands, swung out in space. It fell a long way before it struck. It struck against boulders fifty yards below them, burst into bits. They saw a body come out, smash on through underbrush and then splash into the river. Neither Lawrence Dade nor Happy Trevors could look at it.

But Theodore could look. He saw the body swirl out of sight in the rapids of the river and he said, "Well, there she goes, boys. She was dead anyhow. It don't matter to her."

The Dades transferred all their equipment from the back of the overburdened mule and loaded the stuff on Happy Trevors' wagon. They turned the wagon and team around, a difficult job on the narrow trail. But finally they were on the way back to Three Pines.

The Dades rode in the back of the wagon with the mining equipment and listened to Happy Trevors complain.

"It don't seem right," he said, shaking his old head and clucking his tongue uneasily. "In a way it seems sort of like murder."

"Don't think of it that way," Theodore Dade told him. "Me and Lawrence wouldn't think of hurting anybody. Old Grandma Cartwright was dead anyhow, wasn't she? Does she care if she goes to the cemetery or not? I don't see how you can call it murder. How can you murder somebody that's dead already? Also, Lawrence and me ain't killers. We never killed nobody in our lives. You take like up there at Indian Bluff; Lawrence and me could have killed the Monterey Kid, but we didn't. The Dades ain't killers."

Sadie the Queen met them on the road and reined her horse to a stop. The team in front of her also stopped. The three

men on the wagon couldn't help but notice what a fine built woman she was.

Sadie said, "Where is it? Where is it, you fools?"

"Where's what?"

"The casket. The body of—of Grandma Cartwright?"

Happy Trevors blushed and spit tobacco juice at the ground. "It's a terrible thing, Miss Sadie. I was coming down that grade back there—"

"Sure," prompted Theodore Dade. "Old Happy was coming down the grade back there. The casket slipped off."

"Yeah," said Happy Trevors. "It slipped off."

"Slipped off?" Sadie's throat felt dry. "What happened to it?"

"Well," said Happy Trevors, "about all I can say is it slipped off. I liked Grandma Cartwright as much as the rest of us, Miss Sadie. But it just slipped off and went down over the cliff."

"You fools!"

She slapped quirt to the horse and rode around them and on down the narrow road, the pine slope rising steep above her, the cliff dropping away precariously.

Happy Trevors said to Theodore Dade, "I wonder if she suspects something?"

Theodore Dade snorted, "Of course not! What could she suspect? Can you help it if the casket slipped off and fell down the cliff?"

Around a sharp bend in the road, Sadie the Queen came upon a lame mule, without harness or packs, just standing there and muzzling for food among the pine needles. She saw the tracks where a wagon had been turned around, and she swung off her horse and went in her stocking feet through the mud. She went to the outside edge of the road and looked down.

It was a long steep drop. Fifty yards below her she could see where the coffin had smashed against boulders, splitting itself open. Below that, a hundred yards, she could see where the wood and the

body had torn through underbrush. Below that place, still a long way below, was the river—the river rushing and swollen full from the fall rains.

She got down on her knees, the silk dress and its many ruffled petticoats trailing in the road. No tears were in her eyes now, none at all.

She continued looking down at the swollen river.

She said, "I'm not a good woman, Lord, and maybe I have no right to pray. And the man I'm praying for—he's no good, either. I'm not asking You to take him into Heaven, because deep in my heart I know he's not the kind of man You take. I know You'll send him to hell, and I know that's where he belongs, on

account of all the terrible things he did while he was living. I'm only asking You one little favor, Lord. It's all I ask, and it's all the Kid would ask, too. When You send him down there to hell, all by himself, all alone, just give him a couple of guns—so he has a chance to fight his way out. Just give him a gun in each hand. Please, Lord. Amen."

She got up from her knees and walked over to the horse that had cost twelve hundred dollars, cash, and she mounted and rode slowly back over the road to Three Pines.

Frank Anderson would be waiting for her at the saloon.

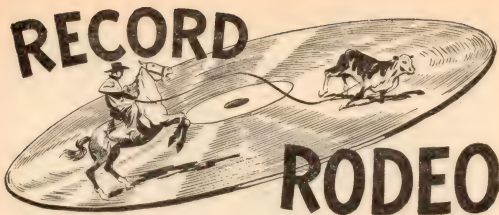
And Sadie the Queen always paid her debts.

Answers to CATTLE COUNTRY QUIZ

(Questions on page 51)

1. If a Westerner is said not to act "like a colt" it would be meant that he is either not young or has been "out West" for a good long time.
2. A rancher who is "on the Black Hills" is one who has somehow been shoved off his range.
3. If the ranch boss told you to pick up a horse by his hind feet, you should rope the animal by the hind feet.
4. True. A "piebald" horse is a spotted horse—or a "paint" horse.
5. True. In the language of the Westerner, "pulling bog" means to pull animals from bog holes.
6. A "puncture lady" is a female gossip.
7. True. A "road agent spin" and a "Curly Bill spin" are the same thing.
8. A "road brand" is a special brand placed on cattle making a trail trip. It is used as an aid toward preventing trail-herd cattle from becoming mixed with others.
9. The true Westerner is most likely to refer to a rifle as a "saddle gun."
10. True. A *salea* is a soft piece of sheepskin used as a pad under an animal pack.
11. If the ranch boss sent you out for a "slab-sided" horse, you should return with a thin horse.
12. A "silver thaw" is rain which hits the ground and then promptly freezes.
13. If a cowpoke asked you for some "snake water," you should get him whiskey.
14. To the Westerner, the word, "snubbed," means dehorned.
15. If you had a lot of work to finish up in a hurry, you should avoid selecting a "stick horse" to aid you. A "stick horse" is an animal which can be made to work only with difficulty.
16. True. A "straw shed" is a winter building made of poles and straw.
17. A "swimming horse" is an animal which swims well. Not all horses do.
18. "Surly" is the cowpoke slang expression for a bull.
19. True. A "Walker pistol" was an early day type of revolver.
20. The Spanish word *vaca* means cow.

RECORD RODEO

A stylized illustration of a cowboy on a horse herding a cow on a vinyl record. The cowboy is on the left, riding a horse and holding a lasso. The cow is on the right, running. The entire scene is set within the circular frame of a vinyl record, with the center hole visible. The words "RECORD" and "RODEO" are written in large, bold, sans-serif capital letters at the top and right respectively.

By Joey Sasso

WE VALUE your opinions on these record sessions, fans, and we'd very much like to hear from you. Sound off, and you may be a prizewinner. For the best letter discussing the reviews in each issue, the writer will receive, absolutely free, one of the best new albums of Western music. The writers of the next two best letters will each find in the mail, with our compliments, one of the latest Western releases. Address your letters to Joey Sasso, care of this magazine, at 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

PULL up a turntable and let's go for another spin, Western style, all you record fans. Since we last saw you, we're mighty pleased to report, there's been no change in the boom of Western music on records—unless it's a change for the better. We've got a lot of guitar and fiddle music to mull over, and a couple of new stars to introduce to you, so let's get right down to the record wranglin'. Here's the latest on wax:

PRETTY PLEASE LOVE ME
TEXAS STAR
SPADE COOLEY AND HIS BAND
(RCA Victor)

Spade Cooley's Western band has sophistication and plenty of pep, as can readily be seen in his latest pair of RCA Victor cuttings. Ginny Jackson does the vocal honors on "Please," as she voices her lovelorn plea. The backing is a real hoedown square dance, with a caller and the crowd having a big old time. It's a

fast-moving number that'll have everyone kicking up his dancing heels.

RUBBER KNUCKLE SAM
WEDDING BELLS WILL NEVER RING AGAIN
TEXAS JIM ROBERTSON AND THE
PANHANDLE PUNCHERS
(RCA Victor)

For his newest RCA Victor cutting, Texas Jim Robertson has a fast-moving boogie number, with a rhythmic washboard in the background. Jim really keeps the number rolling along at high speed, as he lyrically describes "Rubber Knuckle Sam," the leader of the washboard band. It's got a staccato quality and a beat that's hard to keep from tapping feet to. Jim waxes very melancholy on the flipover, *Wedding Bells Will Never Ring Again*, as he mourns his lost love who's married another. Jim's deep and resonant voice is limelighted to perfection on "Wedding," with just the right amount of

melodic underpinning from the Panhandle Punchers.

MY HOBBY

I'VE GOT THE FEED 'EM IN THE
MORNIN' (CHANGE 'EM) FEED 'EM
IN THE EVENING BLUES

TENNESSEE ERNIE

(Capitol)

Capitol spots Tennessee Ernie on a fine up-tempo Western in which he carries on about his favorite gal. Ernie Ford, also in Capitol's Western division, dreamed up this ditty. For the plattermate, Tennessee chants on another fine side also written by Ernie Ford. He takes this clever opus at moderate speed.

WHY DON'T YOU LOVE ME

A HOUSE WITHOUT LOVE

HANK WILLIAMS AND HIS DRIFTING

COWBOYS

(M-G-M)

You can count on this one's hitting the honor roll of hits quickly—and you can count on its staying fixed there for a while too. Yessir, it's a surety, because the platter is top-drawer Hank Williams fare, and neatly balanced fare at that. "A" side holds a swingy, bluesy ballad that Hank tricks out in some fine and fancy vocalizing. The flip has contrast in the lament-like *A House Without Love*, a tune that Hank projects with a wealth of conviction and feeling.

MULE BOOGIE

CHANGING YOUR NAME

SHEB WOOLEY WITH HIS CALUMET
INDIANS

(M-G-M)

A pair of promising sides by folk artist Sheb Wooley. "A" side offers a bright, rhyme-daffy novelty about a boogie-happy mule. It's a number that looks big, and no version looks bigger than Sheb's. The backer gives us *Changing Your Name*, an

indigo-tinted ballad by Sheb himself. The tune is a pretty one, a thing the boy obviously realizes, since he sings his heart out on it.

I'M WALKIN' ON A RAINBOW

I'M PAINTING THE TOWN WITH
TEARS

SLIM CARTER WITH HIS COUNTRY
BOYS

(M-G-M)

A pair of swell sides by popular folk star Slim Carter comes your way with this release. The topside is a pretty ballad, handled in Slim's usual smooth way, while the reverse is a touching lament with a hint of the blues to it. As always, Slim's Country Boys back him in a top-drawer manner, allowing some fine solos to seep through.

I WONDER WHERE YOU ARE TONIGHT

THE DRUNKARD'S SON

HANK SNOW (THE SINGING RANGER)

AND HIS RAINBOW RANCH BOYS
(RCA Victor)

Hank Snow, the Canadian balladeer, really has a sense of humor, as evidenced by his latest RCA Victor waxings. Hank'll have everyone in the aisles with this platter, as he tosses off the humorous lyrics with verve. The Rainbow Ranch Boys get with Hank to give him the peppy backing he requires.

YOU'RE GETTIN' A GOOD GIRL

BETCHA I GETCHA

CAROLINA COTTON

(M-G-M)

A talented new Folk star with an engaging voice and a different style joins the MGM roster with this release. She's Carolina Cotton, a charming Arkansas girl who will soon be seen in a round half-dozen new movies, we hear. Carolina's first selections for us are a couple of delightful folk ditties: *You're Gettin' a Good Girl*, which is cute and shuffly, and *Betcha I Getcha*, which is a bit more abandoned in tempo than its plattermate.



SHOOT- OR SHOW YELLOW!

By T. C. McCLARY

CHAPTER ONE

Half a Man

WITH day's first pulsing flush of rose and amber light the girl rolled and stretched and moved to the window with a sleepy frown to gaze out at the range. Solid slabs of slate-gray mist lay like scattered jigsaw pieces through the still-blue, shadowed hollows of the prairie. Morning's early sounds floated down from the bright-topped

hills... a yodeling signal call, the beat of an angle-iron, the deep-chested bawl of Curley Simpson's Brahma.

It crossed her mind with irritation that she was getting town bred and lazy. Range life ran a full hour ahead of the town's; it was keyed on dawn and sundown. *The best times of the day, she thought with her mood gaining. What is there in town but a shopkeeper's life and mediocrity?* And with that thought she summed up much of the arrogance and

*A fast iron may change a man's brand—but only
blood will wash out a yellow streak!*



He got the women back
from the advancing flame.

pride of the large cattle-owning caste.

She was range born and bred, and in spite of town's advantages, her heart and feeling, her likes and prejudices were still out on the range. When her father lived, she had ridden the hills with him before the full breaking of the mists; she would never grow away from that—the range's wildness and violence and tough fiber; its peace and loneliness and silence.

She turned to combing her thick jet hair, seeking to judge the values of just how much a ranch was worth against a woman's softer traits. Not that there was anything really wrong with Curley Simpson; his roughness and toughness and

boastfulness were cow country traits she had been brought up with and could understand. But he was cruel on a horse and she had seen outright brutality in him when he had a man whipped. It was hard to tell just where those streaks would end.

For a space she sat with her comb laid against the hollow of her cheek, wondering why it was that the nicest men had to be the weak, and beyond that why Clyde Mercer had put a tenant on his ranch and turned to storekeeping. It was a small ranch, but neat as a pin. Her father had always claimed that, given that ranch to start with, a man with any gumption could

boss the whole range around it some day.

But Clyde had walked off it after that last tough winter, before his first steer crop was even prime. Maybe he meant to go back to it sometime, as he'd told her privately. Or maybe Curley knew what he was talking about when he jeered that it was too tough for Clyde. In the meantime, Clyde was just a common storekeeper, a penny-grubbing bookkeeper working for Naught's Feed.

The girl felt scorn and indignation grind up through gentler feelings and finished with her hair hurriedly, her eyes ashine. She was first down to the kitchen and, filling the pot at the pump, she glanced through the brightening light to Mrs. Stokes house, where Clyde was chopping the day's wood. Actually, he was a boarder and there was no reason for him to be doing chores. But it was like him to do it, and it struck her with a jolt that maybe he was just the kind cut out for small chores and not much better. A sweet guy but without much fiber.

She turned to find her mother in the doorway following her gaze. Nodding toward Stokes, her mother commented, "I don't believe he has missed the woodpile a single day since he moved there."

"I'm sure of it!" the girl answered stiffly. "He's steady as the mail delivery."

"That wouldn't be a bad quality in a husband," her mother murmured. "A woman could do worse than pay some serious heed to Clyde."

"A townsman!" the girl sniffed. "And he gave up a good ranch to boot! Pa would turn in his grave if he heard you say that, ma, and you know it!"

"Yore pa, God bless him, was stiff-backed as a poker, but it didn't help him to leave his ranch clear of debt, Abby. Don't underrate a man who'll swallow his pride to get some cash in hand. Your father's day was different, but life wasn't any easier for it."

The girl chopped panfries with a bak-

ing powder tin. She had her feelings and they were mixed, and the one part of her denied the other.

At seven twenty-nine precisely she saw him leave Mrs. Stokes' and, giving her dish towel a final wring, she moved through the latticed porch to the back yard. She stood with her arms lifted, taking her time hanging the towel on the line until after his footsteps stopped behind her, giving him this brief space of full and unchallenged looking before turning.

"They could set the town clock by you, Clyde," she greeted him.

He smiled, taking it as a compliment and clearly lifted by this momentary daily nearness to her. He nodded beyond her at the clothesline. "Most women hang their towels over the sink, but you always hang them outside to dry."

She moved to the picket fence, wiping a wisp of hair back with her wrist. "A thing needs sun and air," she answered. "But so help me Hannah, you're a regular biddy for other folks' doings!"

"Man can't help but cut sign on a purty woman," he grinned. But his eyes weren't grinning. They were hard and dry and drawn.

He gave her a shy yet solid look and cleared his corded throat. "I've been aiming to ask you about the Odd Fellow's picnic," he murmured. "But I find I'm slated to work late that day."

"So your boss can go on time?" she asked with a shade of spite. "But I'm promised anyway, Clyde."

He said, "Oh!" and dropped his blunt, honest gaze. He ticked the top of the pickets with a stubbed finger. He looked up abruptly with a tight grin. "Well, save me a dance anyway if you're able."

Never a comeback for her sharpness, and she felt suddenly small and mean and contrite. "Of course!" she promised, and her voice was gentle, but she still could not hold back the thing upon her mind.

"Clyde," she asked, "what made you give up a good ranch for a grubbing store job?"

He looked evasive. He said hesitantly, "Well, one thing, I've not got a decent beef herd built up yet. But another, this is a job where you learn a heap about feed and grass."

She gave a faint breath of mockery. "With all the grass hereabouts, you need to know that?"

"It never hurts to know things," he muttered. He felt the depths of her scrutiny and his brow furrowed. "You don't approve of a store job?"

"Not if a man is cut out for an owner," she said bluntly.

He darkened. "Mebbe I'm not cut out for an owner, Abby," he told her.

It left them dangling in an awkward silence.

"Well," he said, after a space "I'll look forward to that dance if you aren't too popular."

She watched the swing of his broad shoulders down the street, thinking, *He's good with a rope. He rides like he's part of his horse. He has a good little ranch. He could amount to something on this range, but it must be he just hasn't got the toughness. What man with any pride would go to work for wages?*

THAT pretty well summed up the arrogance and rigid code of the cattle-owning caste. This was cow country and she was not alone in her thinking. Even the cowboys felt a superiority to him. She had heard it said flatly that any man who quit ranching for storekeeping when he didn't have to just didn't have the guts to ride the range in trouble and bad weather.

The conclusion was that he didn't have much spunk or fight. This was added to by the fact that he had let Curley Simpson crowd in on a girl he had run with since schooldays, and that he had eaten hum-

ble pie and done nothing about Curley's jeering scorn of storekeepers, although he had definitely heard of the remarks.

The dust softened drum of hoofs reached from in front of the house, and four riders came into view and drew up hard as Clyde Mercer reached the corner. Curley Simpson drew rein a little apart from his men as became an owner, sitting his saddle with an arrogant assurance, a man with hard muscles pressing their mould against his black satin shirt, with a permanent fiery hue beneath his charcoal range burn. He had a rough-hewn face, lined by rough temper, and ready challenge was a constant light breaking from the mirror surfaces of his jet eyes.

"Why strike me for a buzzard!" he grinned, "if it ain't our ex-prize ranger turned feed expert and town dude! Clyde, is it right what I hear tell, that you've saved so much money you aim to buy Naught out of his own business?"

Clyde gave him a steady gaze, resisting Curley's goading humor and giving back no spark of rising anger. "Why, any time you have the cash to buy my ranch," he answered, "I might do that little thing."

Truculence rippled under Curley's taunting expression. Cash was an ever-touchy subject with him, as was poker. He gave a contemptuous blast of breath through his nose. "Who told you I'd even look twice at that vestpocket hole you call a ranch?"

"Mebbe the same man told you I meant to buy out Naught," Clyde told him.

"That is funny as hell," Curley growled. "One of these days you're going to say something that really makes me laugh."

"Always ready to oblige a neighbor," Clyde nodded.

"Don't neighbor me!" Curley snapped. "I don't have grubbing storekeepers and law-calling townfolk for neighbors!" The rancher's eyes blazed, and then he gave

a harsh bark of sound and spurred his horse into a break start for which he was noted—and which had killed three horses under him in the time he should still be riding one.

The girl leaned over the fence, peering through the first flat rays of golden light, sensing every movement as Clyde Mercer's head turned after Curley's dust. She saw the tightening of his back and then the flexing of his shoulders and the relaxation he forced upon himself, and she had a picture of his brows gathering together as his lips compressed. Embarrassment drifted from him like a dark shadow, but he had taken that last crack full on, and from that standpoint, he had been bested even if he had outsmarted Curley's humor.

She watched the swing of his body from the waist, as if he would turn to look back and see if she was there, then some inward shame or other feeling stopped him. He stood a moment, still half turned, staring at the ground, then, lifting his head as if with forced decision, continued on his way.

Why did he have to take that? Hasn't he got any pride at all? By sundown, that will be all over the range.

She turned with violence in her movement and strode back into the house. Her mother was just coming from the front parlor. She had seen and heard everything, of course. Sometimes Abby thought that was the chief reason they had moved to town.

Abby said savagely, "Steady as all get-out—even about eating humble pie!"

Her mother fiddled with a bowl of flowers. She said thoughtfully, "If you had lived through the years of broken bones and crippled bodies over nothing that I have, Abby, you'd be thankful to see somebody with some restraint setting an example."

"A fine example!" the girl sniffed. "Swallowing a point blank insult like

he did, right smack in front of others!"

Her mother darted her a probing look. "You thought about how many men Clyde would have to fight once he starts taking insult over the hazing about his job?"

"That's just the point!" the girl snapped sharply. "The whole range can't be wrong in what it thinks."

"Sometimes I wonder," her mother murmured. "If the range thought much, you wouldn't have ranchers killing themselves with a life of worry to die in bankruptcy, and you wouldn't have grown men expert at their line working their lives away for twenty dollars a month."

The girl stared at her. "Ma, a body would almost think you were siding with the meek! And pa was one of the toughest fighters this range ever knew!"

"Things were different then," her mother murmured. "I don't think you'll find Clyde slacking if there's ever need to fight for what is right."

The girl exploded a breath of angry disagreement and her mouth closed tight. She liked Clyde; she didn't like to see him take an insult standing, even if it was from Curley Simpson.

The next morning she heard the rhythmic hard clunk of Clyde's axe biting wood, and she thought she would not go out as usual, but he saved her the trouble by changing his time fifteen minutes in leaving Mrs. Stokes'. She watched him pass from behind the lace curtains in the parlor, but could not figure from his expression what thoughts of yesterday he had, if any. His face was a mask, telling nothing in its expression, and passing the house he did not turn to look in.

CHAPTER TWO

Flaming Range

ON SATURDAY night, Curley ended a building feud with Abe Stetson when he caught him drunk in Shannon's bar and beat him to a pitiful,

gasping pulp. That gave the gossips something new. But midway of the week, Abby was shopping when Clyde walked down the main drag, and she scalded to the waves of laughter and remarks that followed him like a flood.

But the worst humiliation of all was that he walked on unperturbed, as if the gibes and laughter didn't matter, as if he were above such trivial opinion. He touched his hat as he drew near her and his motion slowed as if he meant to stop.

The nerve of him, she thought angrily.

She was looking straight at him as he touched his hat, but now she sharply turned away her face. No nod, no acknowledgment of his courtesy, no least sign that she had seen him. From the tail of her eye she saw color flow and ebb in his face, and then she found herself looking straight into Annie Macey's mocking smile, and Annie asked with unsheathed claws, "Cutting old friends from shame, dear?"

"He was never that good a friend," she flashed out of humiliated panic.

He was moving stiffly now for the first time, self-conscious at her cut. From the shadow of Reardon's Hardware, Curley Simpson had watched the whole thing, and now he swaggered out from the doorway and took a position on the edge of the top step. Wicked deviltry made whirling lights down deep in his eyes, and as Clyde came abreast, Curley asked loudly, "Whatzamatter, ranger, don't the gals cotton to your store smell?"

Clyde stopped and turned square to the steps, but for an instant his head was down and he stared at the steps with his lips compressed.

In front of Reardon's, Clyde suddenly lifted his face and a man's tight level look square at Curley, but there was not fight as much as enormous weariness in his face. "All right, Curley," he nodded. "It might as well be now as sometime."

"Why, damn me!" Curley muttered in

his throat. He had been purposely building a fight for weeks, but this had come a little cool, a little sudden, and besides he had a date. He was not ducking trouble, but a boyhood beating from Clyde twelve years back crossed his mind, and he didn't want to get messed up.

"Why, damn me!" he repeated, eyes firing. "Now I'm supposed to listen to a danged storekeeper tell me where I'll make my trouble!"

Clyde shrugged. He said almost as if it didn't matter now, "All right, you name it. Where and when?"

Violence geysered up through Curley and broke in his expression. "Why, right here and now, I'll say!" he bit out savagely, and jumped with elbows thrown forward, meaning to crash Clyde's chest.

But Clyde knew the trick and threw himself sidewise on one hand, so that Curley landed on the walk with his balance and momentum thrown forward hard and, pitching across the boardwalk, keeled over forward, striking his forehead on the hitchrack and sprawling flat.

Curley was out cold, colder than if he'd been kicked square in the face by a bronc. Theoretically, it was Clyde's fight. But not a blow had been struck and that left Clyde's status hanging.

A sparked-up waddy commented uncertainly, "Curley can't fight—mebbe I ought to take this on."

The marshal looked up hastily. "I'll have no riot here and no more fights today!" he clipped out curtly.

"Anything you say," the waddy grinned. "But I didn't aim to do it for Curley. I have my own angle." He swung his mocking gaze to Clyde and let scorn show clearly on his face. "Jist figure," he added, "Curley got the words out first."

Some friend grabbed the waddy's arm and swung him into the nearest saloon, and Naught came down the street frowning and took Clyde along. Out of the

crowd he said privately, "Curley had that coming, Clyde, but you're working for me, and I can't have trouble with half the ranches. You'll have to settle with Curley sometime."

"Sure," Clyde answered with irony. "Just how?"

"That's up to you," Naught grunted, bosslike.

Naught stuck his thumbs under his galluses, tipped back his head and studied the molten, brassy sky. "Be a good feed winter," he said, to change the subject. "Hot as hell already."

He stopped dead with his mouth hanging open his eyes bugging wide. "Lord-amighty!" he suddenly hollered. "Brush-fire a-coming up the Glacier!"

His yell froze the town momentarily. The Glacier was actually a thirty mile cut of flat grass and brushland curving down through two chains of hills. It varied from seven to ten miles wide, and a few miles from its crest the town sprawled out upon the Glacier's face. The fire was still in the distance, but a brush and grass fire could move mighty fast with wind.

"Well, hellsbells!" Clyde growled at the freeze and ran to the big iron hoop to wallop a message out across the range.

He threw down the sledge finally, standing back to catch breath. Everybody was suddenly yelling and shouting and running every which way.

Curley had come to and was soaking the facts in through a haze of raging pain. Clyde trotted over to where he sat.

"Curley," he said, "you've got men in town. Send them riding. Get the word out to the ranches to race it to Fifteen Mile with every pick and spade and hoe and ax they can find."

Curley scowled up at him and barked, "Get your damned townsman's hand off my shoulder, and don't think I'm taking orders from a storekeeper!"

Clyde's mouth compressed and he shook

Curley in spite of him. "Look, fella, the fight can wait. This needs every tool and man fast!"

"I'll round up the men," Curley grated. "But I'll make up my mind where we begin!" He lurched erect and squinted through an alley at the sky.

"Dammed muddlehead!" he growled arrogantly. "You must think the range is going to take tote wagons. That fire is still down on the lip. We'll get to twenty mile easy and lick it, with no wind!"

RANCHERS and waddies crowded around them, voicing vigorous agreement with Curley. Even the townsmen stood behind him, hating the range's roughness and violence with all their hearts, but at any time of trouble, bowing beneath the range's whip. Clyde looked at the knotted women, his gaze singling out Abby.

She threw Clyde a smile, but she pressed her way into the circle of Curley's assumed high command. She plucked at his arm. "Curley, what can the women do?" she asked.

He gave her a man's look of hurried dismissal. "Not much, I reckon, Abby, but keep purty for the picnic!"

But Annie Macey went to Clyde. All of the spite and venom was dropped off her now. She stood there, a pioneer woman with one of the most endangered ranches, and she asked forthrightly, "Clyde, what can we do, and how?"

Clyde gave her a smile of appreciation. "There isn't time to go home," he told her. "You'd best get the women lined up and gather all the pots and blankets and range vittles in town. And water. Have every woman who drives out tote a loaded barrel."

She nodded and turned to her job, and she was half through with orders when Abby rejoined the women's group.

It was sundown when the first riders caught the first hot, burned breath of

the fire and, turning back, reported it not on the lip as Curley had guessed, but three miles up the Glacier.

Clyde said, "That will catch updraft. We'd better start trenching."

Curley gave him a look of fiery contempt. "Trenching? Gawdamighty, you afraid to get yore purty white skin burned a mite? We can drag a break before that fire ever gets up here."

He had the arrogance and violence and he had taken the authority, and the range was solidly behind him, and the townsmen came along like whistled dogs. Curley sat his horse with full consciousness of the figure that he cut, but he knew grassfires and he had the mantle of authority and his orders stuck. Wagon beds were ripped loose and chained to three horse teams, and riders began dragging a firebreak clear across the Glacier.

The sun dropped in a fiery ball behind the town, and below them, the solid sheet of green-shot yellow flame advanced.

It was growing hot when the last drag came back across the glacier with the raking crews behind. Curley sat like a general on his horse, mocking gaze filling with scorn as a sweat-soaked Clyde hove in sight. Clyde had worked with the raking crew and there was not an inch of him that was not soaked.

"Seven miles of our best hay you'd have lost us, Mercer!" he called loudly.

Clyde took a dipper of water a woman brought him and leaned on the handle of his spade. He looked at the western sky, still holding streaks of red and dark brown yellow. The oncoming blaze was spitting sparks.

He nodded a grudging admission at Curley and gasped for want of wind, "Mebbe you were right, Curley, but you chanced a breath of wind."

"Hell, ranching was built on chances!" Curley sneered. "But I forgot you wouldn't know about that, being a townsman."

Clyde's jaw hardened, but he let the insult pass. He sucked a deep lungful of air, and felt the burned-out scorch of it and noted, "Well, that kind of ranching isn't for women. You'd best get them rolling out of here!"

Oh, darn him! Why does he have to talk so much and just make it worse all along? Abby asked herself.

But Annie Macey had heard him and began to round up the women and get them moving back.

He got busy fast, for the heat grew explosive and islands of fresh fire began to burst up ahead of the main flame. Then solid waves of fresh fire began to spring up almost clean across the Glacier at the same instant, each time farther and farther ahead. It grew blistering hot and men began to move back without complaining.

The fire came up to the band of flattened and loose-raked hay with an angry roar, but the main sheet stopped there, blazing against its pitch black hood, and only small tongues burst up in the firebreak, blazing high for an instant, then burning down to a bare flame or fading glow. The men had stopped far back, and now the women started to slow, but Clyde got them back into gallop.

On the brow of a hump, Abby pulled up a wagon team sharply and, waiting for Clyde to ride over, told him shrilly, "I've gone as far as I intend to! I aim to stay here and see the fun."

Annie Macey's high voice came back from up ahead. "For good Hannah's sake, Abby, stop arguing and come along!"

"What for?" Abby snapped back tartly. "Curley would have let us stop half a mile back with the men!" She shot Clyde a molten look and flung up her chin. "Yore getting worse than a—" she started to say, and her words were cut by a series of rapid, muffled reports.

She looked back and there was wild commotion among the black figures of

men and horses cut sharply against a fresh blaze of light that ripped across the whole width of the Glacier as she looked. The next instant, fresh heat came at her in solid, smashing waves.

CHAPTER THREE

Hell by Night

SHE jerked a look back toward Clyde, her eyes wide for him to see apology. Her mouth a stricken oval of the terrible things she'd thought and said. But Clyde was already galloping for Annie Macey's wagon.

He gave her a look and sang out hoarsely, "Work with Annie now!" and swung the team in a circle back.

Some man got singed and let out a hoarse yell.

"If you want 'em roasted, just stand there gawking!" Annie called. "But if you want 'em home to patch, get to soaking gunnysacks pronto!"

There wasn't much time to look after that, but Abby saw Clyde's wagon swing and stop against the sheet of flame and a second later saw men beating with wet sacks on the fringes of the flame. There was no way to backfire with only women here, and every man was needed by the firehead, trying to force the fire as they would a wild herd.

But the heat grew too intense and she had to drop back.

Nine times lines were formed and each time the drop back was not far enough, and black-burned men bearing ugly red blisters had even stopped cursing now for want of breath and were cutting their work periods to ten minutes. On the last flareup, the fire raced in a circle around four men and one of the Ebbs brothers was trapped, and going in after him, his brother came out with both of them alive, and yelled crazily, "I ain't dying for yore bullheadedness, Curley Simpson! I'll listen

to Clyde now!" and then he collapsed.

Curley's jaw clenched and his eyes were pools of flaming red, but he jerked out a raw-voiced snarl, "All right then, storeman, if we ain't got enough cow guts left, we'll play it safe like you want!"

Clyde leaned on a grubbing hoe almost sealed to his raw-blistered hands. He studied the fire clean across the face; he wet a finger and lifted it into the wind. He turned and swept the unburned Glacier with his gaze, and he was still silent when Curley's crackling yell broke at him, "Lordamighty, you trying to help this fire?"

"No, but there's no natural bottleneck left now. I say drop back to the other side of the dry ravine that cuts the Glacier. There ain't time to trench."

Curley stared at him with rising anger. "What are you trying to do, Clyde?" he bit out. "Make a fool out of me? That ravine is a full ten miles up the Glacier! That's two thirds of the hay we have for priming and for winter!"

"That's right," Clyde nodded. "But that's what I'd do in your place."

There was a mixed muttering of argument, but chiefly assent.

"Why, you damned fools!" Curley yelled at them, "Can't you see? Who's he work for but Naught the feed man! He wants to see this grass burned clear!"

There was a dead silence pulsing suddenly with tempers more dangerous than the fire for Mercer. Then Naught's voice came with its town shrill, "Ain't you forgetting most of it from here is my hay?"

They pushed back in a straggling line, leaving the growl of the fire behind, and with the feel of first dawn on their half naked flesh, finished the firebreak to the hills. The night's earlier breeze had died, but the firehead was already marching up.

"All right, we've done it!" Curley yelled at the spent men. "And there's liquor back with the womenfolk!"

Gaunt-eyed and haggard-faced men

lifted their heads toward him and tried to grin, and there was a feeble attempt at a raw-throated cheer.

But Clyde spit and said with the quiet steadiness of oiled steel, "I don't reckon that heat will jump the ravine, but we've got three miles of nothing but tramp-down here. If it was me running this show, I'd space out men and keep 'em there."

Curley trotted his horse over with a look of black mayhem on his face, almost riding Clyde down before he jerked the horse to a stop.

He glowered at Clyde, then suddenly straightened in the saddle and gave a sweeping movement of his hand. "There ain't no more wind now and there ain't a chance of a jump here! Them that want to stay and be loco with Mercer, let 'em! Me and my outfit, we're heading for a drink."

His own men got their horses grinningly, and a few others came straggling, and then about half the range riders came over to Curley's side.

Clyde counted riders' heads until no more seemed to be drifting behind Curley. "Just recollect," he told them then, "that if this fire gets by here, it will run through open brush and grass into the hills and snake back right on your ranches."

He saw some hesitation, but they had already hit leather and had their pride at stake, and Curley's sudden blast of cursing invective countered what Clyde had said. Curley gave him a long glare of savage hatred. "Just you recollect," he barked at Clyde, "we ain't settled an earlier score yet, and this will top it!"

The men rode off, the roaring of the coming fire gobbling their hoofbeats, and then the fire was at the firebreak, snapping and tonguing and trying to jump. But men were there.

They worked madly at beating back that growing circle, worked with Clyde cursing them and shaming them.

They got the fire out as light cut down over the choking smoke cloud, and more dead than alive and more naked than clothed, made their way across the plain.

SILENCE fell over the camp as the straggling firefighters came within the cookfire's light, and men who had been comfortably drinking for hours saw that red-eyed, singed and raw-burned crew.

Clyde handed a groaning man down to shamed and ready hands and moved his horse along into the circle of brighter light. Abby gasped at the way he looked and suddenly turned on Curley.

"And you sitting here sousing up," she raged at him, "And telling me he was just putting on an act!"

She moved across to Clyde and, unmindful of the watching crowd, put her face against his knee and cried.

He laid a gentle hand on her neck, unconscious that the whole hand was wet with blood. In that gentle touch was a message of complete understanding and forgiveness. But there was nothing gentle in his eyes.

His eyes were directly upon Curley, and now he said to the shamefaced ranching crowd, "There's been a heap toq much joking on the range about townfolks' softness. Well, here are the town men straggling in my dust, and you can thank them mostly you've still got ranches to go back to."

Curley growled, "Why in hell didn't you send for us?"

"Mebbe," Clyde told him, swinging stiffly down, "because we couldn't spare a man to send. Or mebbe just for needing only men with guts."

Curley stiffened with a scowl. "That's strong talk, Mercer!" he growled.

"It ain't strong enough," Pop Staver told them. "It ain't near strong enough, and I'm included!"

Curley did not turn his head, but he

felt Pop's feelings move through the range men, touching their shame and rousing anger that now turned upon him.

Curley licked dry lips and hitched at his belt, and tried to put himself back right. "I reckon you're right Pop, and I needed that telling! But we were all in it together and tempers are raw!"

Clyde was coming toward him, charred of flesh, singed of flesh, stiff as a board, but step unwavering. He came right up to Curley before he stopped, and looking him square in the eye, still managed to reach out and grab Curley's hand.

He turned it over and held it out in plain view, and there was not a cut or blister or raw place on Curley's palm, and by comparison, his clothes looked new. "I figure the whole range and the whole town were in this but one man," he said steadily. "And that man is you, Curley Simpson, and like you said, we've got a score to settle."

Curley stared at him, lips twisted in an arrogant smile of disbelieving humor that flattened out under the drilling impact of Clyde's steady gaze. He snatched his hand away and turned to the crowd for backing.

"Hell," he grated, "I can't fight him in his condition! He's loco to pick on a fresh man!"

"Now he mentioned it, how come you're so fresh, Curley?" Pop Stover grunted. "There was some times there when an extra man could have been right helpful."

Curley felt the rising tide of condemnation and his face paled. "Lordamighty, boys!" he yelled on a cracked note. "You don't think I'm yellow?"

No single voice answered, he saw no softening in a single eye.

Then Clyde's voice came at him. "That's what I aim to find out Curley. I can recollect in school when I licked you. You crawled away and cried."

Curley gave him a wild look. "No,

don't make me fight you now, Clyde!" he muttered hoarsely. "It ain't fair to your own hide!"

"I ain't got much hide left to worry about," Clyde told him, and his fist smashed Curley in the nose.

He took a wicked blow that set his head blazing and brought blood from his mouth. But it wasn't the blow that mattered; it was that the blow knocked a thought into him.

He danced off and stood out of reach, cutting sign on the fire-eaten man, and then he knew the answer, and fear came up through him with freezing fingers. "You aim to go back to ranching, Clyde!" he yelled as if it were an accusation. "You just been working to save against something."

"I been spending, not saving," Clyde told him grimly. "Spending to buy up Abby's father's spread and pin it onto my range!"

Clyde's cracked lips pulled back in a grin and then hurt as his hands did. They turned to savage battering rams. Curley made a try at fighting, but in all that crowd he could not feel one person who thought he was the better man.

And then it struck him that out of that whole country, he did not have one solitary friend, not even Abby, and he did not have the kind of guts that could stand up under that, as Clyde had. His blows were wild and strengthless and he kept backing off.

Then he heard Pop Stover's snort of contempt, "Why hell, strip the strut and glory off him and breast him with a man ain't dead drunk, and he ain't no man at all hisself! He ain't half a man!"

He heard that and stood frozen with shock, and in that instant, Clyde's fist smashed him in the mouth, and he covered his face and stood there bawling, not even knowing the beating he was taking for the wild and bitter grief within him at the death of Curley Simpson.



Sudden Death Street

By RAY P. SHOTWELL

*The nation's blackest Fourth occurred
on a nameless street in a nameless town
—where Rattlesnake Jake sought a bul-
let—with his name on it!*

THERE'S nothing in the modern Fourth of July celebration to compare to the way they whooped it up in the past. Consider the case of Rattlesnake Jake, a character who gave the celebration his all. With his partner, an unwashed, unkempt gunhand nicknamed Long-haired Owens, he had been on the dodge for months, in hills far from the law. But on that fateful Independence Day of '84, the two came into town.

It was a normally quiet little town, and even after it was sparked up for the holiday, Jake and his partner made a conspicuous pair. As if their very appearance weren't enough—it was familiar to all who beheld from a dozen wanted posters—they insisted on being major features of the day.

When the citizen dressed to impersonate Uncle Sam marched past, Owens knocked him down with his gun butt, and then, turning the gun around, forced him to grovel in the dirt.

Fascinated, the town watched. There are outrages so flagrant, so mindless, that it is easier to let them take their course than to stop them . . . this was one of them. Soon it became apparent even to Jake and Owens that the frightened actor was just an actor.

They decided to shoot up the town.

They staggered down the dirt way, firing into the hot blue sky, roaring their wordless challenges. Someone stepped out of a store doorway, bored with the show at last, and shot Owens.

And then the two drunken celebrating outlaws gave the town a Fourth of July to remember. Back to back, out in the dusty open, they kept firing at darkened doorways from which endless rifle bullets were aimed at them.

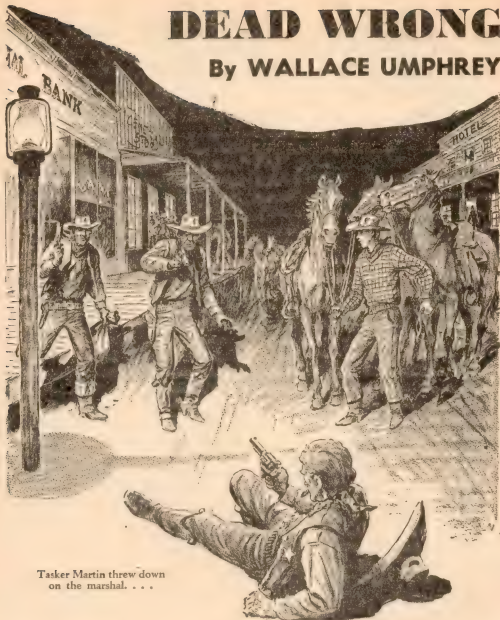
They were dying, but they kept shooting, impelled by some urgency not to be understood by men on the other side of the law. They were shooting at law itself, at the holiday, at the fast-coming darkness. They took only one man with them—a reckless youngster who attempted to cross the beleaguered street.

The best of shows must end, and after a while Owens and Jake ran out of both bullets and breath. The townspeople came out of their dark doorways, Winchesters in hand, to count the holes they had put in the outlaws. They summoned the photographer to take pictures of the two, they asked each other what inarnation had prompted the pair to come to town in the first place.

No one was sure of the answer. But all agreed it was the liveliest Fourth the town had ever known.

DEAD WRONG

By WALLACE UMPHREY



Tasker Martin threw down
on the marshal. . . .

THEY CAME out of the little park and then halted at rimrock to let their horses rest. Both riders were covered with the dust of many a weary mile. The valley spread out like a giant fan, and far below them was the town.

Bellamy, tall and gaunt and saturnine, hiked a leg over the saddlehorn and rolled a smoke.

"We're here, Kid," he said. "Yonder's the town."

The Kid fumbled a little with a grin.

*"We've missed you, Kid," his home town told him,
"but come back a-shootin'—an' our bullets won't!"*

He was a rangy, tall, sandy-haired youngster who had grown so fast that he looked like a scarecrow. It was nothing a couple of more years and a lot of food wouldn't fix up.

He'd been away for about four years. Now that he was home he began wondering if he'd made a mistake coming back. He'd been reasonably happy down on the Four J Ranch in Texas, and maybe he shouldn't have drawn his time.

"What's the matter?" Bellamy asked.

The Kid glanced shyly at his partner. "Nothin'."

"Kid," Bellamy said, lifting a dark eyebrow, "you got eyes as soft as a girl's."

The Kid glanced away. "I just feel kind of funny."

Bellamy nodded. "Sure. It's the hate inside you. I've done a powerful lot of hatin' in my time, Kid. You hate this town and you want to get even."

"I want to show 'em."

"Sure," Bellamy said. "Kid, how old are you?"

"Seventeen," the Kid told him.

Bellamy pinched out his cigarette, between forefinger and thumb. "Let's mosey."

The Kid swung his shy gaze back. "I ain't goin' down there tonight. Folks'll recognize me. I got to study out what to do about it. And I got to show 'em they were wrong about me all along."

Bellamy shrugged. "Suit yourself."

"I'll make camp back in the park," the Kid said.

"Got any money left?" Bellamy asked.

The Kid pulled out three gold pieces and looked at them. Then he handed two of them to Bellamy. Bellamy watched the Kid slide the remaining coin back into the pocket of his worn levis. The bottoms of the pants hit the Kid about halfway between ankle and knee.

"Don't spend it all for whiskey," the Kid said. "We need some grub." The Kid smiled eagerly. "There's a lot of nice

ranches down in the valley. Maybe we can get hired on."

"You sure got a sense of humor, Kid," Bellamy said with a chuckle. "Well, see you later."

The Kid watched his partner out of sight and then made camp. The park was cool after the heat of the day. A small stream sang over its rocky bed. The Kid turned his horse out to graze and then leaned back against his saddle on the ground. For a while he tried looking at the blue sky through the tops of the trees.

His restlessness wouldn't go away. Sometimes he felt lost—like now. It was as if he were nobody, as if he weren't even sure of his own identity. The trouble was this: he was a child no longer and yet he was something less than a man.

Down at the Four J Ranch he'd been doing a man's work when he asked for his time. "Okay, Verne," the old man told him. "You rode in here four years ago lookin' like a plucked chicken. I let you swamp for the cook. Then you began takin' care of the hosses and lately you've been doin' range work. Pretty soon now you'll be a top hand. But I won't argue with you. There's somethin' on your mind and you got to get it off before you can really pull your weight. Ride back any time you want a job."

The Kid stood up and stared at the small stream. Then he began shedding his clothes. His body was thin, but there was plenty of bone to carry the weight he'd have someday.

The water was cold, but he didn't mind. He splashed at full length in the shallow stream, puffing and blowing, lathering himself with a cake of soap from the saddle roll. Afterwards he towed himself dry, singing at the top of his lungs.

It was funny the way he'd run into Bellamy. He'd seen the small glow of the campfire his first night on the trail home. He'd blundered toward it, pathetically

eager for companionship. The camp had seemed deserted and he'd been about ready to cut loose with a yell, when there'd been a soft click from the shadows.

"Reach," a voice had told him. "Clasp your hands behind your neck."

The tone of the voice more than anything else made the Kid comply. He didn't consider drawing his own gun. A man stepped out of the shadows and came toward him and the Kid could see the cocked revolver in the man's fist. The man swung him roughly around so that the firelight shone on the Kid's thin face.

The man's gaze was sharp and raking. He grunted something and then backed off, his gun still ready. The Kid was scared and he squatted by the fire and then in a rush of words he began talking about himself. He didn't leave much out and the man heard him through before holstering his gun.

"I'm Bellamy," the man said. "Got any money?"

The Kid had been paid off with about two hundred dollars and he told Bellamy that.

"Good," Bellamy had said. "I'm headin' your way. We might as well ride together."

NOW, AFTER toweling himself dry, the Kid dressed swiftly, his body tingling from the cold water and the rubdown. Suddenly he was very hungry. Lately it seemed as if he could never get enough food to stick to his belly. He kindled a small fire and put some water on to boil for coffee and then heated a can of beans and made some flapjacks. He used most of the remaining grub and it made him feel a little guilty, but then he told himself that Bellamy was buying some supplies in town.

Probably he'd talked too much that first night, the Kid told himself while he ate.

But Bellamy'd had the drop on him. Bellamy himself never had much to say. The Kid had the idea that maybe he ought to pattern himself after the older man.

For the first few days of their ride together they'd avoided towns. It was Bellamy's idea. He told the Kid that he was wanted by the law for a couple of things he hadn't done. Bellamy was broke and for the first few days he sent the Kid alone into a town for supplies. The Kid wanted to reach home with a little money in his pocket, just to prove he was somebody now, but he couldn't very well turn Bellamy down.

The farther they got from Texas the more Bellamy seemed to relax. He told the Kid that this was new country to him.

Sometimes the Kid wondered if he ought to trust Bellamy, but Bellamy gave him no cause for suspicion. And the Kid was eager to please. He'd never had a real pard before and Bellamy accepted him as an equal. It made the Kid feel like a grown man.

Bellamy was all right, the Kid thought now. Bellamy was a hard, bitter, cynical man. But that was something the Kid could easily understand.

The town was bigger than Bellamy had supposed. Maybe it had grown since the Kid had left. Thought of the Kid made Bellamy grin. The Kid was okay. A little light on experience and brains, but okay. Bellamy had a genuine liking for the Kid, making him think of an overgrown puppy.

Bellamy cantered down the main street, his eyes swinging with restless watchfulness from side to side. He didn't think he'd be recognized here, but there was always a chance his past might catch up with him.

In front of a saloon called the Golden Nugget he dismounted and racked his pony. Before entering he hitched up his gunbelt and wiped his dust-caked lips.

DEAD WRONG

The first drink slid down with the smooth feel of silk.

"Nice town," he told the bartender.

Business was slack and the bartender put his arms on the bar and nodded his gray head. The bartender was a fat, elderly, garrulous man with a white apron tied around his ample middle.

Bellamy poured himself another drink, liking the feel of the whiskey sliding down his throat. He listened carefully while the bartender talked. The bartender told him a great deal about the town.

"Ever know anybody named Verne Barker?" Bellamy asked.

The bartender screwed up his face. "You must mean the Barker kid. His old lady ran off with a tobacco drummer and his old man was the town drunk. The old man died last year. You mean a scrawny youngster about the size of a small midget?"

"That's the one," Bellamy said quickly. "He's workin' on a ranch now down in Texas."

"Ran away from home three-four years ago." The bartender smiled. "Good thing, too. Always figured he might have a chance if he got away from here. People always judge a youngster by his folks. He wouldn't have no chance around here."

"Think he'll ever come back?" Bellamy asked.

"If he's got a lick of sense he won't," the bartender said. "All anybody around here would see in him would be his old man and old lady. Sometimes it's best to bury the past and start out fresh. That youngster's better off where he is now."

Bellamy was staring into the bar mirror. A bearded man sitting alone at a table was watching him. Only partial recognition came to Bellamy. It fretted him and his hand crept down toward his gun butt.

"Sure glad Verne Barker's makin'

WILL YOU BE 1 OUT OF 9?

According to American Medical Association "Journal" one in every nine persons became a hospital patient last year.

HOSPITALIZATION SICKNESS or ACCIDENT

(Age Limit 90 Years)



HOSPITAL



ACCIDENT



SICKNESS



OPERATIONS



MATERNITY

Every speeding ambulance calls attention to sudden accident or sickness. Can you listen to the screech of a siren with a satisfied feeling that you and your family have insurance to help pay Hospital, Surgical and Medical Bills? If not, you should investigate our New Hospital-Surgical Plan that is issued to both Individuals and Family Groups at a very small cost that everyone can afford. We think it is the newest, most modern and up-to-date Hospital Protection Plan on the market today. It covers you in any hospital. It also pays benefits when not hospitalized, for emergency doctor treatments. Send in this coupon or a penny postcard. There is no obligation. **No salesman will call.**

Act Now...Today

BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

This offer may be withdrawn WITHOUT NOTICE.

AMERICAN LIFE & ACCIDENT INS. CO.

231 American Life Bldg., St. Louis 8, Mo.

Tell me how I can enroll in your NEW Hospital-Surgical Plan. I understand I am not obligated in the least.

Name

Street or Box No.

Town Zone State

Mail Coupon Today

ATHLETE'S FOOT

Dr. Scholl's Fast Relief and Healing Aid!

Don't wait! Get Dr. Scholl's SOLVEX today! This famous prescription of Dr. Scholl's quickly relieves itching, kills fungi of Athlete's Foot on contact, aids rapid healing of red, raw, cracked or peeling skin. Insist on Dr. Scholl's SOLVEX. In Liquid, Ointment or Powder form.



Dr. Scholl's SOLVEX

INVENTORS

If you believe that you have an invention, you should find out how to protect it. We are registered Patent Attorneys. Send for copy of our Patent Booklet "How to Protect Your Invention," and an "Invention Record" form. No obligation. They are yours for the asking.

McMORROW, BERMAN & DAVIDSON

Registered Patent Attorneys

150-L Victor Building Washington 1, D. C.

Find HIDDEN TREASURES

GEIGER COUNTERS for Uranium Detection (see at left), TREASURE DETECTORS for gold, silver, etc. Lightweight, ultra sensitive. None finer at ANY PRICE.

INFORMATION FREE.

Detection CO. Dept. 9-Z
5631 Colwege, No. Hollywood, Calif.

NAUSEA

...Helps to control organs of balance. Quiets the nerves.

THE WORLD OVER

caused by sudden changes when flying, relieved with



OWN a Business

Clean and mothproof rugs and upholstery "in the home or office building". Patented equipment. No shop needed. Duraclean Dealer's gross profits up to \$15 and \$20 a day on EACH service man. These Nationally Advertised services create repeat customers the year 'round. Easy to learn. Quickly established. Easy terms. Send today for FREE Booklet—explaining full details. No obligation. Duraclean Co., 679 Duraclean Bldg., Deerfield, Ill.

Advertising BOOK MATCHES

SPOT CASH PROFITS . . . REPEATS

World's Largest Direct-Selling Book Match Manufacturer offers you big opportunity in profitable year 'round business. Make money with MATCHCOMP 20, 30, 40 and 240-light book matches. Low prices for high quality. Repeats. Full or part time; men, women. NOTHING TO BUY, giant 250-page catalog and other catalogs furnished plus selling information.

Get started right away—WRITE TODAY!

MATCH CORPORATION OF AMERICA

3433-43 W. 46th Pl. Dept. PG-90, CHICAGO 32, ILL.

126

FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES

something of himself," the bartender said.

"Yeah," Bellamy said, no longer interested. "Yeah, yeah."

The bartender moved away and Bellamy turned slowly, a thumb hooked over his gunbelt. The man who was watching him grinned suddenly. Total recognition hit Bellamy all at once. He relaxed, grinning in return, and strode toward the table.

"Didn't make you with that beard," he said. "Hello, Tasker."

"Sit down, Bellamy," the bearded man said.

Bellamy slid into a chair. "What's on your mind?"

"Probably the same thing that's on yours," the bearded man told him with a chuckle.

The Kid had finished washing out the frying pan with gravel from the creek, and now he was leaning back against his saddle. The sun was going down. The Kid had eaten only an hour ago and now he was hungry all over again. A man needed meat to stick to his ribs. He sure hoped Bellamy returned with some decent grub.

A horse's feet sounded on the trail. With one swift movement the Kid rolled over, scooped up his gun and then dodged into the underbrush. He knelt there, tense, waiting. Then Bellamy rode into the park.

Still holding his gun in his hand, the Kid came out of hiding. Bellamy dismounted.

"Put it away," Bellamy said with a laugh. "Kid, you'll do. You learn fast."

"Where's the grub?" the Kid asked.

Bellamy was a little drunk. "I got something a whole lot better'n grub, Kid. Tomorrow you'll be able to buy enough steaks to reach from here to Kingdom Come."

"I'm hungry," the Kid complained.

"Listen—" Bellamy squatted on his heels. "The town's growed since you left.

DEAD WRONG

There's been plenty of water and grass in the valley and the little ole bank is bulgin' with cash. There's a dance in town tonight and that means a lot of noise and hullabaloo. The only law is an old geezer who looks like he don't know which end of a gun is which."

"That's Lafferty," the Kid said. "More 'n once he's tanned me good."

Bellamy laughed. "I don't like seein' a bank too weighted down. Tonight we'll lighten it some."

The Kid jerked upright. "I ain't gonna help rob no bank!"

"No danger," Bellamy told him. "Met up with an old friend in town—a gent named Tasker Martin. He's throwin' in with us. A good man to have along on a deal like this."

"I don't want no part of it," the Kid said.

Bellamy's tone hardened. "You want to get even with the town, don't you?"

The Kid nodded. "But I'll be recognized. I don't want to take the chance—"

"Nobody'll spot you," Bellamy said. "I mentioned your name a couple of times. Everybody remembers a scrawny runt only thirteen years old. In their minds you're still that way. Nobody'll connect you up with Verne Barker."

"I don't like it," the Kid said.

"Shut up!" Bellamy's tone was sharp. "Don't go and chicken out now. You got to start somewhere. Just watch me and do like I say and you'll get started right."

Bellamy grinned. "Saddle up, Kid. Tasker's waitin' for us in town. This time tomorrow we'll be long gone..."

IT WAS dark when they rode side by side down the main street. The saloons were crowded. Somebody yelled and then somebody else fired a shot into the night sky. Bellamy grinned over at the Kid. The noise and confusion would be a perfect cover-up for the big job ahead.

ECSTASY

ALLURING! EXCITING!

Famous Earl Carroll Beauty

LORNA RHODES

presents

MON SECRET

EAU DE COLOGNE
A DELIGHTFUL SCENT



FREE—Purse-size vial with each order \$1.95 large 4 oz. bottle—M.O. only. Write—LORNA RHODES, 525 W. 47th St., New York 19, N. Y.

WANT FAST PROMOTIONS?

Finish HIGH SCHOOL at Home

High school graduates get first crack at those better jobs! You finish in months with C.T.I. guided study. Equals resident school. Texts supplied. Credit for study elsewhere. College prep. Diploma. Easy terms. Write for free booklet today!

COMMERCIAL TRADES INSTITUTE
1400 Greenleaf Dept. H67-9 Chicago 26



STUDY AT HOME for Business Success and LARGER PERSONAL EARNINGS. 40 years expert instruction—over 114,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All text material furnished. Easy payment plan. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance"—NOW!

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. B-30, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Illinois

MONEY FOR YOU—SELL FREE SAMPLES CHRISTMAS CARDS—UP TO 100% PROFIT 50¢ per 1

Make Money Easily. \$50 profit selling 100 Picture Boxes. Complete line big value, fast selling plastic, metal Christmas and every day cards, smart gift items. Embossed designs, cards, stationery, napkins, coasters with name \$5 for \$1 up. No money or experience needed to start. Fund raising plan for churches and clubs. Special bargain offers. Cash bonus. Write for samples on approval.

EMPIRE CARD CO., 140 Fox St., Elmira, N. Y.

CHECK ASTHMA SYMPTOMS ANYTIME!



Anytime—anywhere! Convenient ASTHMADOR—in powder, cigarette or pipe mixture form—is always ready and easy to use. ASTHMADOR's soothing, aromatic fumes bring welcome relief from the distressing symptoms of bronchial asthma. Economical, too. At any drug store in U. S. and Canada.

DR. R. SCHIFFMANN'S
ASTHMADOR



SEND FOR THIS FREE!

Make money. Know how to break and train horses. Write today for this book **FREE**, together with special offer of a course in Animal Breeding. If you are interested in Gaiting and Riding the saddle horse, check here () Do it today—now.

BERRY SCHOOL OF HORSEMANSHIP
Dept. 849 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

WANT
\$50
QUICK

Nationally advertised Card Asst's—sell only 100—make up to \$50! Complete line Xmas, Everydays, Wraps, Stationery. Also dramatic "Spang-l-ettes" and Famous "Prize" Asst's; Notes: Name Imprinted Xmas Cards, 40 for \$1 up. Up to 100% profit. Money back guarantee. Request "Prize" and novel Metallic Xmas Boxes on approval.

30 FREE SAMPLES

CHILTON GREETINGS, 147 Essex St.,
Dept. T-33, Boston, Mass.

NERVOUS STOMACH

ALLIMIN relieves distressing symptoms of "nervous stomach"—heaviness after meals, belching, bloating and colic due to gas. ALLIMIN has been scientifically tested by doctors and found highly effective. More than a 1/4 billion sold to date. For sale by all drug stores on money-back guarantee.

ALLIMIN Garlic Tablets

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Secure "Patent Guide" together with "Record of Invention" form—without obligation.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON

Registered Patent Attorneys

026-G District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.

WATCH FOR THIS SEAL OF QUALITY!



BECAUSE—

We purchase 4,000 stories a year, over 20,000,000 words of top-flight reading pleasure, all bearing this guaranteed hall-mark of unexcelled fiction entertainment—

Watch for this Popular Fiction Group seal on every magazine you buy. It is your one sure guide to good reading always!

POPULAR PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
205 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES

The hitchracks in front of the saloons were full. Bellamy grinned again, nudging the Kid in the ribs.

"Guess we'll just have to tie up in front of the bank," Bellamy said dryly. "Looks like everythin's made to order."

They left their horses in front of the small frame bank. The Kid felt ill at ease.

"Nobody'll recognize you," Bellamy told him. "Anyway, we'll keep out of the lights. Better that way."

They mingled with the crowd on the high board walks. Nobody looked twice at the Kid. A small, lean man bumped into him in the crowd. The small man smiled and nodded politely and then passed by. The Kid turned to look after him.

"Lafferty," the Kid said. "He was wearin' a marshal's badge long before I was born."

"See?" Bellamy told him. "He don't know you from Adam."

The Kid nodded. "He used to whap me around. Now I could do the same to him."

Bellamy laughed. "Well, after tonight you'll be even with him."

A bearded man ambled up and began talking quietly to Bellamy, but looking straight at the Kid while he talked.

"Meet the Kid," the Kid heard Bellamy say. "He'll hold the hosses and take care of things outside. Kid, this is Tasker Martin."

Somebody was singing loudly. Another gun banged. Bellamy and Tasker began drifting toward the bank corner. The Kid trailed along close behind.

It was quieter in front of the bank. Bellamy touched the Kid's shoulder and then he and Tasker Martin were gone. The Kid leaned against the hitchrail, feeling lonely. Like nobody at all. Lafferty, the marshal, tramped slowly past, breaking his stride when he saw the Kid leaning

DEAD WRONG

there. The Kid turned quickly away and began tightening the cinches on his saddle. The marshal went on down the street.

The Kid felt restless. It seemed to be taking Bellamy and Tasker Martin forever to get the money. The Kid tried listening to the noises of the town, wanting something on which to concentrate. He thought of the town marshal instead.

It would be easy for him to lick Lafferty now. The Kid flexed his man-muscles, grinning in the darkness. He could sure whip old Lafferty with one hand tied behind his back.

Then the Kid sobered. He didn't really want to whip the town marshal. Just knowing he could do it was enough.

Two shadows appeared suddenly on the small porch of the bank. Bellamy and Tasker Martin. There had been no sound, no sign of alarm. The Kid had the horses loose now, holding them ready.

Boots tramped on the board walk and it was Lafferty coming back. The Kid took off his hat and waved it in the prearranged signal and both Bellamy and Tasker Martin flattened themselves against the wall.

"Ain't I seen you someplace before?" Lafferty asked.

The Kid's mouth was dry. "Not me. Ain't never been in this here town."

Lafferty nodded and went on and the Kid put back his hat. Bellamy and Tasker Martin crept off the bank porch and then began running toward the horses. Bellamy was carrying a big sack in his left hand, a gun ready in his right. Tasker Martin had a gun out too.

The Kid switched his eyes up and down the street. Then he saw that the town marshal had stopped a few yards away and was peering back into the gloom. Then a gun barrel glittered in his hand.

Bellamy fired and the marshal went down.

Install a

MILES PER GALLON & MOTOR TUNE-UP-GAUGE



in 1 minute

- ★ NEW
- ★ ACCURATE
- ★ GUARANTEED

Fits all cars—permanent. Checks spark plugs—checks carburetor and 31 other motor adjustments. Registers miles per gallon at every speed.

Simple to read—Dial in 4 colors. No holes to drill—anyone can install in 1 minute.

Complete instructions furnished.

DE LUXE MODEL CHROME PLATED 3 3/4" in dia. \$12.95

GUARANTEED

SEND FOR YOURS TODAY—

GALE HALL ENGINEERING, INC.
DEPT. 140 BOSTON 18, MASS.

World's Largest Mfrs. of Auto Gauges



2 3/4" in dia.

ONLY \$7.50
F.P.D.



FIX LOCKS

Learn Locksmithing and Keymaking from Experts in Your Spare Time at Home! Locksmithing in big demand! No layoffs, no slow seasons! Age or physical handicap no disadvantage. Year-round, steady income in this permanent, respected field. Full or part time. Practical, illustrated lessons show you how to make money even while learning! All materials and special tools supplied. Send for FREE BOOKLET. LOCKSMITH SCHOOL
55A Park Ave. Rutherford, N. J.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. HG49, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

WAKE UP YOUR LIVER BILE—

Without Calomel—And You'll Jump Out of Bed in the Morning Rarin' to Go

The liver should pour out about 2 pints of bile juice into your digestive tract every day. If this bile is not flowing freely, your food may not digest. It may just decay in the digestive tract. Then gas bloats up your stomach. You get constipated. You feel sour, sunk and the world looks punk.

It takes those mild, gentle Carter's Little Liver Pills to get these 2 pints of bile flowing freely to make you feel "up and up." Get a package today. Effective in making bile flow freely. Ask for Carter's Little Liver Pills, 83¢ at any drugstore.

NOW HEARS WHISPERS!



**New Kind of Hearing-Aid
Makes Living Worthwhile!**

**NO DEVICE
OF ANY KIND
IN EITHER EAR**

This HARD-OF-HEARING man even HEARS WHISPERS AGAIN, yet there is *no device of any kind in his ear!* No so-called "invisible" or "phantom" earpiece, no headband, no pressure anywhere! Whether or not you now wear a hearing aid, you owe it to yourself to prove that you can now HEAR with a brilliance and clarity you never expected to enjoy again, yet *never* wear anything in your ear! Mail coupon at once for FREE information about this amazing invention!

ACOUSTICON, Dept. M-96
95-25 149th St., Jamaica 1, N.Y.

Please send me complete illustrated information about your marvelous new hearing invention that requires nothing in my ear and no headband.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

Zone.....

State.....

CALL IN YOUR FLAG—

—for an exciting run through pages of RAILROAD MAGAZINE. Redball freights and mountain drags, sleepy short lines and narrow-gauge pikes—they're all in the big August issue, now on your newsstand or send 35c to—

RAILROAD

MAGAZINE

205 E. 42nd St., New York City 17



*Smoke for relief—
try them FREE*

ASTHMA-HAYFEVER

Sufferers from Asthma and the discomforts of excessive secretions in the nasal passages associated with Hay Fever have, for over 50 years, found quick, temporary relief by smoking PAGE'S INHALERS. Pleasant, inexpensive. At leading drug stores. Consolidated Chemical Co., 808 Cherry St., Grand Rapids 6, Michigan.

SEND
FOR
FREE
SAMPLES

FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES

More than anything else the Kid began wishing he were back on the Four J Ranch. He'd had no business wanting to come home. There was nothing he had to prove to anybody but himself.

Suddenly he didn't feel restless or lost or anything. For the first time he felt like somebody.

The marshal was propped up on one elbow, lifting his gun. Tasker Martin threw down on him.

The Kid dropped the reins he was holding and fired at Tasker Martin. Tasker Martin staggered back and then swung around, and the Kid dropped him with another shot.

The horses bolted away a few yards, reins dragging. Bellamy was left without a mount.

Bellamy started backing toward the bank, trying to get both the marshal and the Kid in his sights. He dropped the cloth bag he was carrying and money spilled out on the walk. The Kid's first shot at him doubled him up and the next stretched him out.

After it was over a crowd ran up. Lafferty, the marshal, had a shattered leg. He'd have been dead if the Kid hadn't taken a hand.

The Kid went over and knelt beside Bellamy. Bellamy was dying fast. Tasker Martin was already dead.

"Sorry," the Kid told him.

"I made a mistake," Bellamy whispered. "I found out a lot about you, Kid. But I didn't find out if you were honest."

Somebody made a grab for the Kid's arm.

"What's your name, mister?"

The Kid looked at him. He liked being called mister. He knew who he was now. He didn't have to show anybody anything.

"It don't matter," the Kid replied. "I'm just passin' through. Got me a job on a ranch down in Texas."

Build a Fine Business --- FULL or SPARE TIME!

Sell MASON LEATHER JACKETS

EVERY OUTDOOR WORKER
A PROSPECT!

Get Started Right! Don't Invest a Cent!

We furnish EVERYTHING you need to start selling quality leather jackets at once—and to build a fine profitable ever-growing business for yourself.

DON'T just "WISH" for independence. FORGET worries and uncertainties! Get set now for big earnings in your own business, backed by this 46-year old million-dollar company—Leader in its field!

WE SHOW YOU HOW TO MAKE MONEY FROM VERY FIRST HOUR

You get complete FREE SELLING OUTFIT! We furnish How-to-Do-It instructions that help you take orders the very first hour—make good money from the start! You get Proved Selling Aids—a Book written from the practical experience of 5,000 Successful Salesmen—monthly newspaper gives hard-hitting ideas, proved successful in the field—Customer Gifts that bring "Automatic Sales"—everything to help you cash in QUICK!



ALSO SELL EXCLUSIVE Velvet-eez AIR-CUSHIONED SHOES for MEN AND WOMEN



Make plenty of EXTRA money with popular, fast-selling full leather lined Chukka Boot and scores of other fine footwear styles with this wonderful Velvet-eez comfort feature! Cradles feet on thousands of tiny air bubbles, rests feet while you work or stand. Over 150 different styles for men, women, with Velvet-eez and other comfort, and style features. Full line of sport, work and dress shoes. Make extra money with smart line of shirts, raincoats, sport jackets.



National Advertising Opens Door for You

Big, powerful ads in Good Housekeeping and other national magazines make you known to people as the Mason Certified Shoe Fitter. You get the benefit—we pay the BILLS!

Good Housekeeping Seal Clinches Sales for You

Mason's VELVET-EEZ shoes awarded the Good Housekeeping Seal. This Seal ends hesitation. Helps you sell more customers more items. You make more money when you handle this great line and enjoy the support of the institution people depend on for Guaranteed Satisfaction.



**HARRY R. WILLIAMSON
WHO HAS EARNED UP TO
\$21.50 IN A DAY Says**

"I have had many experiences where I have sold as many as 3, 4, 6, 6 and 7 pairs in one sitting. I received a phone call from one party, who wanted 2 pairs of shoes. I went to his store and made 7 sales. My advance commissions on my best day were \$21.50."



GET FREE OUTFIT

RUSH THE COUPON TODAY!

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
Dept. M-616, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

Show me how I can get started in my own business, full or spare time, selling your exclusive Velvet-eez and other shoe styles in my community. Please rush FREE SELLING OUTFIT to me right away. Send everything free and postpaid. My own shoe size is:

Name
Address
City
State

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
Dept. M-616, Chippewa Falls, Wis.



CRESTED
FLYCATCHER



CATBIRD



BROWN
THRASHER

M. Sheriff

BALTIMORE
ORIOLE



WOOD
THRUSH



Woodland Voices

These birds are typical of Canadian summer. In fields and meadows, woods and thickets, the bright singing of these residents lends cheerfulness and color to summer and early autumn.

The birds shown here are all noted summer songsters. The cry of the crested flycatcher could scarcely be called a song, but it is one of the most typical sounds of forest places. They are all great destroyers of injurious insects and grubs. They deserve protection.

Look around your own neighborhood at any time—you'll be amazed at the new world of nature to be found right on your own doorstep! Appreciation is the first step toward protection. Once you've discovered nature, you'll want to keep it unspoiled.

CARLING'S

THE CARLING BREWERIES LIMITED
WATERLOO, ONTARIO

† © 1945 CARLING'S

D81PR

† *Nature Unspoiled* - YOURS TO ENJOY - YOURS TO PROTECT